



Turtles of Massachusetts

Massachusetts has ten species of native terrestrial and aquatic turtles (not including sea turtles), each adapted to a specific habitat and lifestyle. These turtles can be found on land, in freshwater, and in brackish coastal marshes. While some species are abundant, others are uncommon or under stress from habitat destruction and degradation, road mortality, and illegal collecting. Please help conserve our native turtles.

Painted Turtle (*Chrysemys picta*)



Status: Common
 Adult: Carapace 4.5 to 7 inches. Yellow spot behind eye, yellow and red stripes on neck. Light lines on carapace. Shell edge has red and black patterns. Frequently observed basking.
 Habitat: Most wetlands. Found throughout Massachusetts.

Snapping Turtle (*Chelydra serpentina*)



Status: Common
 Adult: Carapace is 8 to 18.5 inches; rear of shell is prominently serrated. Snappers can weigh up to 60 lbs. and have a long spiked tail. Large turtles on land can cause injury from bites and claws.
 Habitat: Most wetlands. Found throughout Massachusetts.

Musk Turtle (*Sternotherus odoratus*)



Status: Thought to be common.
 Adult: Carapace is 3 to 5.5 inches and is smooth, domed and often covered with algae. Head has two yellow stripes running from nose to the neck. Nocturnal turtle, but may be seen basking.
 Habitat: Rivers and streams. Found throughout Massachusetts.

N. Red-bellied Cooter (*Pseudemys rubriventris*)



Status: Massachusetts Endangered Species.
 Adult: Carapace is 10 to 12 inches. Often observed basking in large ponds. Has a red plastron and the head lacks the yellow spot of the painted turtle and the red spot of the red-eared slider.
 Habitat: Ponds. Restricted to Plymouth County, Massachusetts.

Federally Endangered Species

Bog Turtle (*Glyptemys muhlenbergii*)



Status: Massachusetts Endangered Species.
 Adult: Carapace is 3 to 4 inches with a starburst pattern. Neck has a large orange patch. Older turtles may lack keel on the carapace.
 Habitat: Fens. Restricted to southwestern Massachusetts.

Federally Threatened Species

Spotted Turtle (*Clemmys guttata*)



Status: Thought to be relatively common.
 Adult: Carapace is 3.5 to 4.5 inches. Yellow spot patterns vary and are unique to individuals. Older turtles may lack spots.
 Habitat: Vernal pools, wet meadows, scrub/shrub swamps. Found throughout Massachusetts.

Blanding's Turtle (*Emydoidea blandingii*)



Status: Massachusetts Threatened Species.
 Adult: Carapace is 6.5 to 9 inches and is helmet-like with yellow flecking overall. Distinctive long yellow neck.
 Habitat: Shallow marshes, scrub/shrub swamps, wet meadows, and vernal pools. Found primarily in eastern Massachusetts.

Wood Turtle (*Glyptemys insculpta*)



Status: Massachusetts Species of Special Concern.
 Adult: Carapace is 5.5 to 8 inches and usually has pyramidal sculpturing. Underside of legs and neck are usually orange.
 Habitat: Rivers, streams, woods and fields. Found throughout Massachusetts, except for Cape Cod and the Islands.

Diamondback Terrapin (*Malaclemys terrapin*)



Status: Massachusetts Threatened Species.
 Adult: Carapace is 5 to 8.5 inches with distinctive concentric rings.
 Habitat: Salt marshes and protected estuaries. Restricted to coastal areas in southeastern Massachusetts.

Eastern Box Turtle (*Terrapene carolina*)



Status: Massachusetts Species of Special Concern.
 Adult: Carapace is 4.5 to 6.5 inches and highly domed. Plastron has two hinges allowing turtle to close into a "box."
 Habitat: Woods, fields and wetland edges. Found in eastern and central Massachusetts and the Connecticut River Valley.

Red-eared Slider (*Trachemys scripta elegans*)



Status: Non-native, introduced species in Massachusetts.
 Adult: Carapace is 7 to 11 inches with dark stripes or bars. Distinctive red spot behind eye. Often occur as released pets which are now breeding in Massachusetts.
 Habitat: Ponds, streams, and rivers throughout Massachusetts.

From May to October, we might see turtles on roads. As the seasons change, turtles move from one habitat to another, often traveling a considerable distance over land, in search of food, a mate, or a wintering place. In spring and summer, females return to their favorite nesting sites to lay eggs. Many of these journeys force turtles to cross roads or wander through our yards. If you should see a turtle trying to cross a road, and you can safely do so, move the turtle off the road in the direction it is headed. Do not move turtles to a "better location." Please report rare turtle observations to the Natural Heritage & Endangered Species Program.

Note: "carapace" is the upper shell, "plastron" is the lower shell, and turtle size is measured from the front to the rear of the carapace.
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