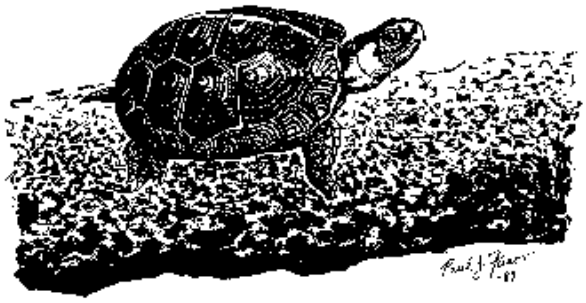
Bog Turtle

Scientific Name: *Clemmys muhlenbergii*



Did You Know?

- Bog Turtles are also known as Muhlenberg's turtles.
- During the winter months, bog turtles hibernate underwater in deep areas of bogs in about 6 to 18 inches of mud. Immature turtles do not hibernate in deep mud until they are 2 to 3 years old. The turtles emerge from hibernation in late March to April and may migrate short distances to feeding and breeding sites.
- The maximum age is estimated to be around 40 years.
- Bog turtles hatch with a carapace length of about 1 inch (2.5 cm), making them enormous hatchlings relative to their adult size.
- They are generally considered to be the smallest turtle native to the United States.
- The bog turtle has a very spotty distribution and is broken down into two "mega" populations: northern and southern. The many northern populations are unevenly scattered through New York, Massachusetts, Connecticut, Pennsylvania, New Jersey, Delaware, Maryland and, possibly, Rhode Island. The northern populations occur at low elevation (0 to 1000 feet) and relatively close to either the ocean or the Great Lakes. The few southern populations are found in select areas of Virginia, North and South Carolina, Georgia, and Tennessee. They are found at higher elevations (2000 to 4000 feet) and are far removed from the influence of any large body of water.
- Bog turtles are habitat specialists being found in bogs, swamps, and wet meadows. They require full sunlight, an abundance of grassy or mossy cover, and spring seepage. They prefer mucky-bottomed waters into which they can dive and quickly bury themselves.
- Bog turtles are omnivorous and will eat in or out of the water.
- The bog turtle was first described and named as Muhlenberg's tortoise (*Testudo muhlenbergii*) by Johann David Schoepff in 1801.

General Information On the Bog Turtle

IDENTIFYING CHARACTERISTICS:

The bog turtle is a small turtle, which reaches a maximum length of 4.5 inches. It has a bright yellow or orange spot on each side of its head and neck. The upper shell, or carapace, is usually black in color but may also be brown. The carapace is domed and often has rings on the shell plates. The lower shell, or plastron, is cream with black blotches, yellowish centers, and hingeless.

RANGE:

Bog turtles currently occur in scattered colonies in western Connecticut, western Massachusetts, and through New York, south to northeast Maryland, southern Virginia, western North Carolina and Georgia.

HABITAT:

Calcareous (containing calcium carbonate, calcium or lime) wetlands such as open sphagnum bogs, wet meadows and wet pastures.

NESTING:

Bog turtles breed in late April to early June after emerging from hibernation. Nests are usually in tussocks or on sphagnum moss in sunny areas of a bog. The 2 to 5 (usually 2-3) eggs are laid from June to July and are left on their own to develop and hatch. Incubation lasts for 7 to 8 weeks and hatching occurs from July to early September. Eggs may overwinter in the nest and hatch in the spring when there is an abundant food supply. The nests are often preyed on by skunks and raccoons. The young are only 1 inch long at hatching and are often taken by a variety of birds and mammals. Bog turtles reach sexual maturity at 5 to 8 years of age.

FEEDING HABITS:

A bog turtle's diet consists of a variety of plants and animals, which are usually consumed in the water. More specifically this turtle's diet includes varied beetles, snails, worms, slugs, millipedes, fleshy pondweed seeds, sedge seeds, and carrion. The turtles feed during the daylight hours; however, they are seldom active during the hottest part of the day and are inactive on chilly mornings. Adult turtles are preyed on by raccoons, skunks, foxes and dogs.

REASON FOR DECLINE

Intensive development pressure in all portions of the bog turtle's range have caused the draining and filling of many wetlands. Remaining wetlands have been isolated, resulting in the fragmentation of bog turtle populations. These small populations cannot mix with others and only breed within themselves. The result is a loss of genetic variation, which then reduces the population's ability to adapt to a changing environment. Bog turtles are very sensitive to changes in their environment, such as increased nutrification, altered drainage, vegetation changes or pollution.