



Life in the Really Slow Lane

The Lamprey River is fortunate to support all six of New Hampshire's native turtle species: Blanding's, musk, painted, snapping, spotted, and wood. Most people have seen a snapping turtle and many have seen a painted turtle soaking up the sun on a water-side log. Musk turtles are common, but since they rarely travel far from water, few people see them. The other three are, in fact, rare: Blanding's turtles are listed in New Hampshire as endangered, spotted turtles are listed as threatened, and wood turtles are listed as species of concern.



Blanding's turtle
Photo by Jon Bromley



spotted turtle
Photo by John J. Mosesso,
<http://images.nh.gov/>



wood turtle
Photo by Mike Jones,
<http://www.mass.gov/>

The main differences between common turtles and rare turtles relate to breeding and range. Common turtles can breed when they are a few years old and tend to lay many eggs. Their habitat requirements are often compatible with human presence and land use. For rare turtles, the odds are increasingly stacked against them.

The three rare turtle species cannot breed until they are well into their mid-teen years and they lay fewer eggs. Their ranges are extensive and they make use of several different kinds of habitat to meet their seasonal needs. They need to make use of places that people often develop, such as old fields and vernal pools. Their interactions with people often occur when they try to cross roads as they travel across the landscape and females of egg-laying age are most at risk. They are also negatively affected by animals that thrive near humans: skunks, raccoons, and foxes. These animals are opportunists and take advantage of easy meals, such as turtle eggs buried in the sand.

Before humans developed the land to suit their own needs, the now-rare turtles were common and thrived. Despite the late onset of breeding and fewer eggs per clutch, they could live and breed to a very old age. Their extensive range was a hedge against one habitat's being unsuitable or the loss of a nest in any given year. Currently, their strategy of slow and steady, far and wide is putting them at risk. The turtles cannot change their strategy, but we humans can help ensure their future by recognizing and protecting the resources they need. Support efforts to conserve large tracts of land, especially those that have a variety of wetlands and uplands. If possible, help turtles

crossing the road to reach the side to which they are headed. Always report sightings of rare turtles, living or dead, to NH Fish and Game's Reptile and Amphibian Reporting Program at [RAARP Reporting | Nongame | New Hampshire Fish and Game Department \(state.nh.us\)](#) so that they can help to ensure the turtles' continued presence.