

# Freshwater Turtles of Nova Scotia



**Eastern Painted Turtle**  
*Chrysemys picta picta*

STATUS Not Listed

The painted turtle has a low-domed shell with red-orange markings on their shell and face. Each shell segment has a white/yellow outline around it. The edge of their shell has red markings. Their bottom shell (plastron) is all yellow/orange. Their head, neck, legs and tail are streaked with yellow/orange. They are the smallest of Nova Scotia's freshwater turtles, with an average adult size of 10-15 cm. Hatchlings may emerge in the fall or remain in their nest until spring.

Painted turtles are the most common freshwater turtle in Nova Scotia and can be found in a wide variety of habitats, including ponds, lakes and streams. They are often seen in groups basking on logs and rocks. Painted turtles nest from May to July along roadsides or in cultivated fields, as well as in sand or gravel beaches.



**Snapping Turtle**  
*Chelydra serpentina*

STATUS Special Concern Vulnerable

The snapping turtle is the largest of Nova Scotia's turtles, and can grow 60 cm or more in length. Their shell is sculpted and bumpy, and jagged at the back. They are brown-grey in colour and have a spiky tail, huge head and pronounced beak. Their bottom shell is much smaller than the top, so they cannot protect themselves by drawing into their shell.

Snapping turtles can be found in a wide variety of habitats, usually characterized by slow-moving water with a soft mud bottom and dense aquatic vegetation. Females lay their eggs from May through June in sand or gravel banks near the water, but will also use other areas such as driveways and roadsides. Hatchlings may emerge in fall or overwinter in nests and emerge in spring.



**Wood Turtle**  
*Glyptemys insculpta*

STATUS Threatened Threatened

The wood turtle has a bumpy, sculpted shell that is dark grey to brown, with beige to orange streaks visible when wet. The skin of the throat, tail, and limbs are orange-red. Hatchlings are light brown and toonie-sized, and adults are about 16-21 cm long.

Wood turtles are the most terrestrial of our turtle species. Wood turtles use a mix of habitats, including clear, moderately moving rivers and the surrounding land, including forests and agricultural fields, where turtles are especially at risk from routine farm activities such as mowing. Females lay their eggs in sandy bars along rivers and other gravel areas (driveways, roadsides, gravel pits) in June; wood turtle hatchlings dig their way out in the fall of the same year.



**Blanding's Turtle**  
*Emydoidea blandingii*

STATUS Endangered Endangered

The Blanding's turtle has a high-domed, helmet shaped (and sized) shell that is dark grey (dry) to black with yellowish flecks (wet). It has a long neck and bright yellow chin and throat. Hatchlings are dark grey with a pale yellow throat, are toonie-sized and emerge in the fall of the same year. Full-grown adults are about 20-25 cm in length.

Blanding's turtles are found in freshwater wetlands, including still water streams, fens, swamps, bogs, and coves. They prefer dark, slow-moving waters, with muddy bottoms and dense aquatic vegetation, including sedge, sphagnum, meadows, cow-lily, and pickerel weed. They need exposed, gravelly or sandy areas for nesting in June.

Nova Scotia is home to four species of freshwater turtles, three of which are designated as species at risk. While each of these species has unique traits, there are several common threats facing all turtles in Nova Scotia:

- Habitat loss and fragmentation
- Mortality from strikes by vehicles or farm machinery
- Unintentional high predation of nests and hatchlings, particularly in areas where human activity causes increased disturbance
- Illegal collection and pet trade

Everyone has a role to play in the conservation of turtles and other species at risk. There are many simple actions you can take to help:

- Clean up your yard. Remove any and report your sightings of wood turtles, snapping turtles, and nesting turtles, and the nesting sites of all turtle species.
- Keep your dogs on the road and drive carefully to avoid turtles.
- Feed and restore natural habitat in your backyard.
- If you have animals very close to your property, keep your yard free of food waste to avoid attracting predators.
- Get involved with local monitoring or protection programs with organizations such as Clean Annapolis River Project or Mirsey / Ictecatic Research Institute.

## Species at risk designations, Species at Risk Act (SARA)

Endangered	Threatened	Special Concern
Species that are in imminent danger of extinction.	Species that are likely to become endangered species if nothing is done to reverse the factors leading to its extinction.	Species that are not currently at risk, but are at risk because of biological characteristics and identified threats.

To learn more about turtle species at risk in Nova Scotia, visit:  
[www.speciesatrisk.ca](http://www.speciesatrisk.ca)

Learn more about Clean Annapolis River Project:  
[www.cleanannapolisriver.ca](http://www.cleanannapolisriver.ca) @Clean Annapolis River Project

Report your sightings:  
Report your sightings of Wood turtles, Snapping turtles and Blanding's turtles. Remember not to collect or disturb the turtles. Take a picture if you have it camera. Record the location and report it using one of the following methods:  
Toll Free: 1-866-727-3947 Email: [sightings@speciesatrisk.ca](mailto:sightings@speciesatrisk.ca)  
Online: <http://www.speciesatrisk.ca/reporting/>

Species at Risk in Nova Scotia: Identification and Information Guide, 2nd Edition  
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