

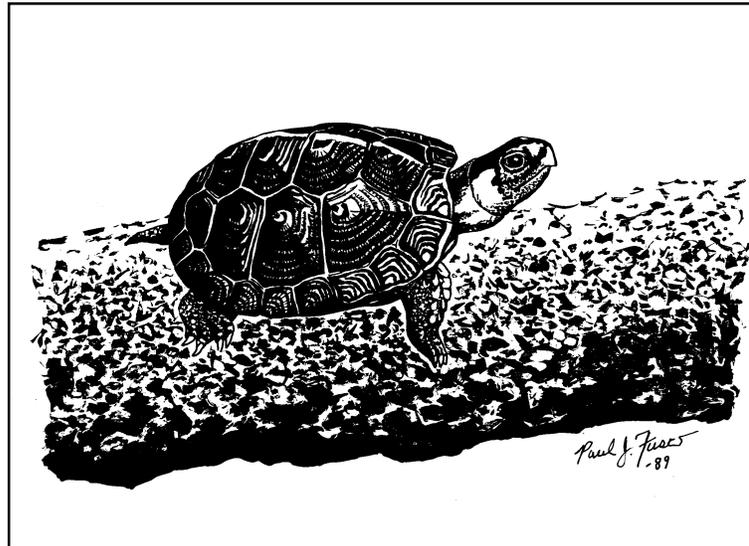
WILDLIFE IN CONNECTICUT

ENDANGERED AND THREATENED SPECIES SERIES

BOG TURTLE

Clemmys muhlenbergii

ENDANGERED



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

Weight: Approximately 4 ounces.

Length: 3-3.5 inches.

Life Expectancy: Although specifically unknown, the maximum age is estimated to be around 40 years.

Food: Seeds, berries, insects, slugs, worms, crayfish, frogs, snakes, snails and carrion.

Status: Federally threatened; state endangered.

Identification: The bog turtle is the smallest of the 8 species of turtles found in Connecticut. It has an orange or yellow head patch which is sometimes divided into 2 parts. The large scutes of the dark carapace, or upper shell, have yellow or reddish hues.

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.

Reproduction: 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. In Connecticut, 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.

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.

History in Connecticut: The bog turtle is the rarest turtle in Connecticut. Only small, isolated populations exist in the state and information on them is scant. Populations of bog turtles have been documented in 5 Connecticut towns. Unconfirmed sightings and single specimens have been reported from several other towns between the Housatonic and Connecticut rivers. Collection for the pet trade has further depleted local populations. In 1973, the bog turtle was given protection by CITES, the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species, and it is currently a candidate to be put on the federal endangered species list. In Connecticut, it is against the law to remove any bog turtle, including eggs, from the wild.

Interesting Facts: 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.

Bog turtles rely on an abundance of grassy or mossy cover and high humidity. Open, sunny areas where the turtles can bask to raise their body temperature are also important. 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.

Protective Legislation: *Federal* - Endangered Species Act of 1973. *State* - Connecticut General Statutes Sec. 26-311 and Connecticut Regulation 26-66-14a.

What You Can Do: Do not disturb or damage bog habitats. Bog turtles may not be collected from the wild, and they should not be kept as pets. The pet trade has encouraged illegal capture of bog turtles in many areas of the country and can only effectively be stopped by reducing the demand for bog turtles as pets.

CONNECTICUT RANGE

