

Bog Turtle (*Glyptemys muhlenbergii*)

Pennsylvania Endangered Reptile Species

State Rank: S2 Global Rank: G3

Identification

The bog turtle (*Glyptemys muhlenbergii*) is Pennsylvania's smallest turtle, growing only 3 to 4.5 inches in length. Its most distinguishing feature is the large orange blotches on each side of the head. The shell and body are a dark brown with no distinctive markings. The bog turtle can be confused with the spotted turtle (*Clemmys guttata*). Spotted turtles have small yellow spots on the carapace, or shell and small orange spots on the head and body. Sometimes, few spots are present and initially the two species may appear very similar. The presence of large orange patches on the bog turtle's head is the best way to differentiate the two species.

Habitat

This turtle has very specific habitat requirements, which is a major factor in its rarity throughout the United States. Bog turtles occur in wet meadows and bogs where tussock sedge and grasses dominate the wetlands. They require open conditions associated with early-successional wetland habitats. The substrate must consist of deep mucky soils fed by groundwater seeps, with only modest amounts of open water. If any of these conditions change, the population can decline and may eventually disappear from the area.

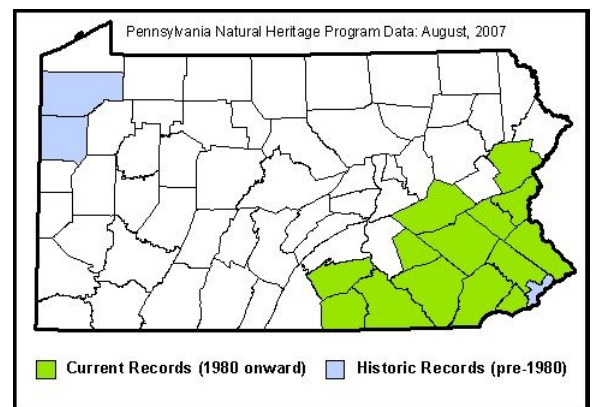
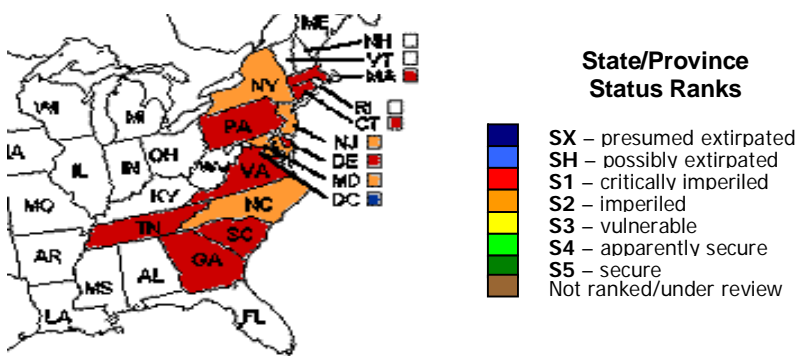


Status

The bog turtle occurs in very low numbers in southeastern Pennsylvania and is imperiled or critically imperiled throughout its entire range in North America. The species is classified as Federally threatened on the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Endangered Species List. Habitat loss, habitat fragmentation and succession are major factors in the decline of this species. In the past, natural wetland succession would occur causing populations to relocate nearby as appropriate habitat became available. With the extreme habitat fragmentation in southeastern Pennsylvania, remaining habitat has been isolated and wetland succession can lead to localized extinctions. Additionally, this species is threatened by decreased water quality, roadway mortality, and predation of nests and juveniles by unnaturally high raccoon populations. Another major threat to the bog turtle is collection. Reptile collectors consider this turtle a valuable prize, as it is the rarest of all North American turtles. In Pennsylvania, fines for illegal collection and possession range from \$250 to \$5000 with the possibility of jail time and additional charges from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. State and federal protection for this species have helped conservation efforts so far, but more resources are needed to continue species recovery efforts in the eastern United States.

North American State/Province Conservation Status

Map by NatureServe (August 2007)



References

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- NatureServe. 2007. NatureServe Explorer: An online encyclopedia of life [web application]. Version 6.2. NatureServe, Arlington, Virginia. Available <http://www.natureserve.org/explorer>. (Accessed: August 13, 2007).
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Pennsylvania Natural Heritage Program