



Natural Heritage & Endangered Species Program

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Massachusetts Division of Fisheries & Wildlife

Northern Red-bellied Cooter *Pseudemys rubriventris* pop.1

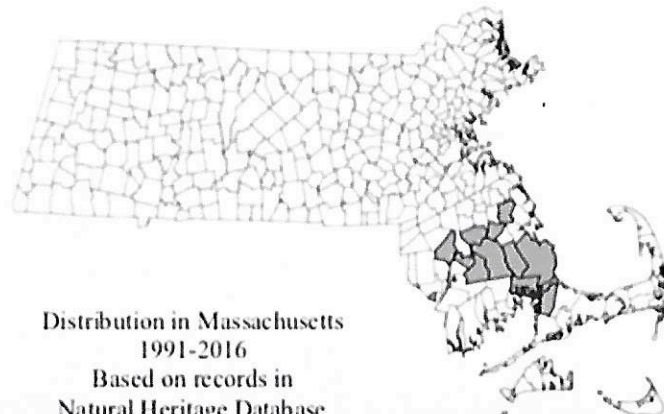
State Status: Endangered
Federal Status: Endangered

DESCRIPTION: The Northern Red-bellied Cooter (*Pseudemys rubriventris* LeConte, 1830) is a distinctive, large (25 to 34 cm [10 to 13.5 in.]), basking turtle that can weigh up to 5.8 kg (12.7 lbs). The carapace (upper shell) of an adult Red-bellied Cooter is black to brown with faint reddish markings. The plastron (bottom shell) of the males is pale pink with dark mottling, while females have red plastrons with borders of grey along the seams of the shell plates. The color of the head, neck, limbs, and tail is black, with yellow or ivory lines. The upper jaw is notched, and a yellow arrow-shaped stripe runs along the throat and neck. Both sexes may become progressively melanistic (blacken) with age. Some adult males develop a marbled reddish carapace. Males are smaller (average 27.2 cm; max. 30.7 cm), than females (average 29.8 cm; max. 34.3 cm), but have longer tails and longer front claws. Hatchlings are about 2.5 cm (1 in.) in length, and more circular in shape, than adults. They have a slightly keeled, olive or green carapace marked with greenish-yellow hieroglyphics. Like adults, juveniles have yellow stripes on the head, neck, and limbs.



Above: An adult female Northern Red-bellied Cooter from Plymouth, Mass., showing characteristic brownish carapace with red markings.

SIMILAR SPECIES: Eastern Painted Turtles (*Chrysemys picta*) are often mistaken for Red-bellied Cooters. Both species have yellow markings on the head and neck and both may have orange plastrons. Red-bellied Cooters lack a pronounced yellow spot behind the eye, have alternated patterned scutes across the back (unlike the Eastern Painted Turtle), can be five times as massive (as adults), and have a carapace that is normally flattened or slightly depressed on top. The Red-bellied Cooter's plastron is coral red or pink, often with dark markings and circular spots along the perimeter, whereas, the Painted Turtle in Plymouth County usually has a solid orange or yellow plastron with no dark markings and a striped perimeter. The Red-Eared Slider (*Trachemys scripta elegans*) is not native to Massachusetts, but has become common in some ponds in the Plymouth area. Sliders may be told from Red-bellied Cooters by the red stripe behind the eye and darker markings on the plastron. Other turtles from the pet trade occasionally show up, including southern



Distribution in Massachusetts
1991-2016
Based on records in
Natural Heritage Database





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Eastern Box Turtle *Terrapene carolina*

State Status: **Special Concern**
Federal Status: **None**

DESCRIPTION: The Eastern Box Turtle is a small terrestrial turtle ranging from 11.4–16.5 cm (4.5–6.6 in.) in length. It is so named because a hinge on the lower shell (plastron) allows it to enclose head, legs, and tail completely within the upper (carapace) and lower shells. The adult box turtle has an oval, high-domed shell with variable coloration and markings. The carapace is usually dark brown or black with numerous irregular yellow, orange, or reddish blotches. The plastron typically has a light and dark variable pattern, but some may be completely tan, brown, or black. The head, neck, and legs also vary in color and markings, but are generally dark with orange or yellow mottling. The Eastern Box Turtle has a short tail and an upper jaw ending in a down-turned beak. The male box turtle almost always has red eyes, and females have yellowish-brown or sometimes dark red eyes. Males have a moderately concave plastron (females' are flat), the claws on the hind legs are longer, and the tail is both longer and thicker than the females. Hatchlings have a brownish-gray carapace with a yellow spot on each scute (scale or plate), and a distinct light-colored mid-dorsal keel (ridge). The plastron is yellow with a black central blotch, and the hinge is poorly developed.



Distribution in Massachusetts
1980 - 2006
Based on records in
Natural Heritage Database



Photo by Laz Willey

SIMILAR SPECIES: The Blanding's Turtle (*Emydoidea blandingii*) may be confused with the Eastern Box Turtle. Often referred to as the "semi-box turtle," the Blanding's Turtle has a hinged plastron enabling the turtle to pull into its shell, but with less closure than in the Eastern Box Turtle. Both may have yellow markings on the carapace; however, the markings on a Blanding's Turtle are spots or flecks rather than blotches. An adult Blanding's Turtle is larger than the box turtle (15-23 cm; 6-9 in. in shell length). While both will be found nesting in similar habitat, the Blanding's Turtle is essentially aquatic whereas the Eastern Box Turtle is terrestrial. Eastern Box Turtle hatchlings could be confused with Spotted Turtle hatchlings, because both have spots on each scute. However, the Spotted Turtle lacks a mid-dorsal keel.

RANGE: The range of the Eastern Box Turtle is from southeastern Maine; south to northern Florida; and west to Michigan, Illinois, and Tennessee. Although Eastern Box Turtles occur in many towns in Massachusetts, they are more heavily concentrated in the southeastern section of the state.