



Blanding's turtles are released into Lake County wetlands after they've reached an age that increases their survival rates. (Photos: Courtesy of Lake County Forest Preserves)

Blanding's Turtle Facts

- Blanding's turtles are medium-sized, semi-aquatic freshwater reptiles that can live more than 80 years.
- Females will travel up to three miles to find a place to build a nest.
- The turtles reach sexual maturity at 14-20 years of age.
- The turtles are endangered because of habitat loss, road mortality, illegal poaching, loss of genetic diversity, and increasing levels of nest predation by crows, chipmunks, foxes, skunks, and raccoons.
- If they reach maturity, then they live long lives due to their very strong "helmet" shells and non-aging capabilities.

The Blanding's Turtle Recovery Program

LAKE COUNTY WORKS TO PROTECT OUR SENSITIVE ECOSYSTEM AND AN ENDANGERED TURTLE SPECIES

GARY GLOWACKI, wildlife ecologist with the Lake County Forest Preserves, with the help of college veterinary students and wildlife technicians, recently released 91 Blanding's turtle hatchlings into local wetlands to grow the population of the endangered reptile.

Once common throughout Lake County, Blanding's turtles were designated as endangered in the state of Illinois in 2009 due to habitat loss, increased pressure from predators, and illegal poaching. In 2010, the Forest Preserves instituted an official recovery program for this species.

It includes a head-starting program where eggs are collected from the field and incubated. Hatchlings are then held in captivity beyond the point of extreme predation.

Since the start of the program, 881 hatchlings have been released. About 65% of those will survive. But once they make it through the first year,

their survival rate climbs to 80-88%, Glowacki said. He estimates the local Blanding's population has tripled to about 522 since the program began.

The turtles released this spring have been cared for since they were born in 2017 and 2018. The Lake County Forest Preserves has been working with experts to ensure success of the program and to monitor the turtles' health. Dr. Matt Allender, a wildlife veterinarian and director of the wildlife epidemiology lab at the University of Illinois, has been assisting with health assessments. Callie Golba, a graduate student at Northern Illinois University, is working in her final season here to evaluate the success of the head-starting project and provide recommendations for a long-term turtle management plan.

"To work with these experts on this program has helped ensure long-term Blanding's turtle persistence in Lake County through the management,

conservation, and re-establishment of viable, free-ranging populations," Glowacki said.

Funding for the program comes from various sources, including the Adopt-a-Turtle program managed by the Preservation Foundation of the Lake County Forest Preserves, where people can become a turtle champion for \$120, which gives them naming rights and a picture of their turtle when it is released.

Other entities that have assisted in the recovery program include the Illinois Natural History Survey, the Illinois Department of Natural Resources, Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources, The Nature Conservancy, and Illinois Nature Preserve Commission.

Glowacki said the turtles are an important part of the ecosystem and make Lake County one of the most biologically diverse landscapes in Illinois. "It's also a very important species for determining the health of the ecosystem. If the turtles can continue to persist here, that means we have good habitat with good air and water quality. These resources are essential for a wide variety of other wildlife and the people who live here," he said.

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