

**A Search for Blandings Turtles
in Blue Earth, Le Sueur, and Watonwan Counties of Minnesota**

April to June...2003

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The search for Blandings Turtles began in February of 2003 by investigating likely habitat thru Ariel photographs provided by Terra Server. Actual field work began in April and continued through the last week of June. Here are the re-written field notes taken during that time of all rare wildlife encountered and likely habitat investigated.

April 8...Met Lisa Gelvin-Invaer at the New Ulm DNR office and looked at maps. Decided to concentrate the search on 4 locations

April 10...Drove out to Lake and scanned the area with binoculars and spotting telescope. Only saw a few **Painted Turtles**. Next drove to wma and walked around, checked out a small pond. Heard the first **Chorus Frogs** of the season.

April 12...from Madelia I drove a zig-zag route down the Watonwan River valley. Heard and saw the first **Leopard Frogs** calling. Found several likely habitats for Blandings Turtles (see map.) Drove to wma and scanned the area but saw no turtles. On the way back to Mankato...stopped at the Dam. The dam maintenance man said that **Fox Snakes** are a fairly common sight around the dam area but had not yet seen any this year.

April 15...found several baby **Garter Snakes** under the rocks along hiway 169 south...on the southwest edge of Mankato.

April 21...drove to wma. No turtles. Stopped at the dam. No snakes yet.

April 22...drove east to Lake. The DNR is burning the prairie north of Gilfillin Lake. Drove to wma and checked out the wetlands there. Saw no turtles. Drove south to wma...no turtles. Back to the Dam. For the first time I noticed the evidence of a huge landslide on the southeast edge of the lake above the dam in the exact location where, in 1999 (?) I Saw an active **Bald Eagles nest**. Now the nest and the tree and the whole area line of trees was gone and in its place, a huge bare notch in the bluff was visible!

April 28...Drove south to wma. DNR had burned part of the area a few days before. No turtles. Went to the Dam. At about 2:00 pm I found an adult Male **Fox Snake** (3 ft.) coiled up in a bunch of dry leaves next to a small opening in the sandstone bluff below the dam and on the right side (east) of the river. He began rattling his tale in the dry leaves quite loudly when he became disturbed! I left the area and came back 10 minutes later and he was gone.

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May 1...Bought a new pair of chest waders. Went out to _____ wma and tried them out by putting in 3 old wire cage turtle traps. Put 1 in the creek just below the small dam and put 2 in the wetland to the northwest. Saw 3 **Meadow Voles**. Heard the call of the "Slough Pump" (**Bittern**)

May 2...went back out in the afternoon and checked the traps but caught nothing. Heard the first **Toads** calling in a pond to the west of the _____ River. Became cool and cloudy.

May 3...Saw a large (4ft.) male **Fox Snake** on the Kasota Prairie road just west across the tracks at _____. Went to the backwater area below the western bluff of the Prairie and saw at least **100 Painted Turtles** basking on logs. Found 2 adult **Fox Snakes** (male and female) under the flat rocks in the ditch at _____ Quarry. (Hiway _____ of Mankato.) Went to _____ wma in the afternoon and checked the traps.

Caught nothing. Pulled the traps, as heavy rain was predicted. Drove to _____. Heard one **Tree Frog** calling in a backwater area of the Blue Earth River. Drove northwest along the Watonwan River to Madelia. Found a canoe access that I never knew about!

May 7... _____ wma. No turtles. Saw a **Plains Garter Snake** trying to catch minnows in the creek. Drove to _____. This time heard several **Tree Frogs** calling in the backwater s.e. of _____ town. Also: heard 2 **Tree Frogs** calling at Willow Creek and hiway 20 (Shelby Township) Then heard 3 **Tree frogs** calling at Willow Creek and co. rd. 144 to the s.w.

Memorial weekend. Friday 23: heard a **Tree Frog** calling at Lake Hanska co. park.

Saturday 24: Cloudy and cool. Drove to the Meadowlark Nature area at St. James: found 4 **Prairie Skinks** under a piece of concrete. Heard 1 **Tree frog**. Drove to the Younger Brothers capture site south of _____ along the Watonwan River. Then drove 1 mile to the east to the bridge at hiway _____. There I noticed a nice looking backwater area nearby but didn't investigate because of the gloomy weather. Decided to come back the next day when the sun was shining.

Sunday 25...beautiful sunny day! Drove back to the backwater along County Road _____ and saw a **Blanding's Turtle** basking on a log! Also observed several **Painted Turtles** and **Snappers** nearby. Drove around to _____ but didn't look like anyone was home so continued to the east and found an abandoned gravel pit and looked around there. Saw a few **Painted Turtles** in the pond. Drove back to the bridge at hiway _____ and put the canoe into the Watonwan and paddled up-river for a short ways till brush and fallen trees blocked the way. Floated back down to the bridge then went downriver an even shorter distance till the route was blocked so paddled back up to the bridge. By then I checked the backwater again and found 2 **Blanding's Turtles** on the log! Didn't try to take a photo as they were basking in an area that was heavily shaded by trees. Drove to _____ then followed a zig-zag route down the Watonwan and put the canoe in at hiway _____. Paddled up-stream a short distance to investigate a backwater area, but found that it had very low water. Heard the **Tree Frogs** calling at _____ again.

May 26...Drove to Sasse Lake and put the canoe in the pond area and paddled around. Put in 3 traps. After that...drove east to the _____ wma along the _____ River and found a large **Plains Garter snake** in the grass.

May 27...Too windy! Stayed in.

May 28...Nice day! Checked the traps at _____ Lake and found nothing. Saw the first **Tadpoles** of the season. Drove to _____ and put the canoe into the _____ River

and paddled up-stream. Observed several large **Spiny Softshell turtles** in the water and basking on the grassy banks! Heard 1 **Chorus Frog** and 1 **Tree Frog** calling. Also: while floating back down stream I saw a large female **Map Turtle** basking on a log at the edge of the river! May 31...pulled the traps at _____ Lake and heard approximately 6 **Sandhill Cranes** calling in the reeds to the north!

June 9...Met Lisa at the DNR office in New Ulm. We drove around to check out possible Bandings habitat around Watonwan County.

June 11...Met James _____ who owns the property where the **5 Blanding's** were located. Got permission to walk back in along the _____ River and look for more. Drove east to School Lake outlet and put the canoe in. Paddled up-stream to _____ Lake northwest of _____. Along the way...was surprised to see several large **Spiny Softshell Turtles** swimming in the creek and basking on clumps of grass along the shore! Also saw 2 large **Snapping Turtles** and several **Painteds**.

June 12...Put in 4 traps at the _____ Ponds northeast of St. James. Drove to the _____ River and looked for the **5 Blanding's**. Only saw 1 on a log on the far side of the backwater area basking alongside a **Snapping Turtle**. Green Duckweed (?) has now covered the entire surface of the water.

June 13...While driving out of Mankato, I saw the Mankato rescue squad heading for Sibley Park. Went down there and discovered that an old guy had just fallen into the Minnesota River from his boat and drowned! (Wasn't wearing a life jacket.) Drove east to St. James and checked the traps at _____. Caught 1 adult **Snapping Turtle** that was nearly drowned because he had gotten tangled up in the mesh. Got him loose and watched over him for good long time before I was convinced that he would recover. I put it on a clump of grass and left. The next day the turtle was gone.

June 14...Checked the traps at _____ ...caught nothing. Drove to the South Fork of the _____ River at county road _____ west of _____. Put the canoe in and paddled up-stream to investigate a couple backwater areas. Found that they were both nearly dried up. Observed no turtles. Saw several **Wood Ducks** with young.

June 15...Went to the _____ River on the west edge of _____ and paddled up-stream nearly to where the _____ outlet come together. Saw 1 **Snapping Turtle**, 2 **Painted Turtles**, several more **Wood Ducks** with young and 2 **young owls**. Drove to the _____ ponds and checked the traps...nothing. I did, however, see what appeared to be large **turtle trails** thru the grass. I followed 2 of them but they both eventually disappeared.

June 16...Drove to _____ and paddled up-stream looking for good spots to put in traps. Went up as far as I could until I encountered a small iron bridge that completely blocked the stream and then I turned back. Checked the traps at _____. Nothing again...but this time one of the traps had been ripped open from the inside out! It was the very same trap that the **Snapping Turtle** had been caught in (that was nearly drowned) so I assumed it was the same turtle that had recovered and had now returned to take his revenge! Pulled that trap and took it home for repair. Drove to _____ Lake and checked out the marsh at the southern end. Saw no turtles.

June 18...Checked the traps _____. Once again, nothing. On the way out I saw a **Painted Turtle** digging a **nest**. Went back to the van to get my camera and when I got back she had disappeared and I saw that she had not laid eggs. Upon closer examination I discovered several other holes nearby that were "**false nests**." Went to _____ Creek

and put in one wire cage trap just up-stream from hiway (?) Drove to Creek at County Road and put in a wire cage trap. Checked the log at the backwater near hiway but saw no Blanding's. Drove in to the property but found no one home. Drove east to Lake outlet and hiway and put in a wire cage trap.

June 19...Met at his place and he gave me permission to explore the south side of the where Creek flows in. Stopped at the backwater along hiway and saw 1 **Painted Turtle**, 1 **Snapper** and 1 **Blanding's Turtle** all on the same log! Walked back in along the south side of the and saw 5 sub-adult **Spiny Softshell Turtles** along the river bank. Where the flows into the I saw several **Softshell tracks** in the mud. The creek, however, was too swollen to cross so I checked out the few backwater areas before that but found them all to be too shallow for turtles. Observed several **Leopard Frogs**. Drove east 2 miles to the and co. road (?) and paddled the canoe up-stream to investigate a large backwater area only to find that it too was too dry and shallow for turtles. Saw several more **Wood Ducks** with young. Floated back down to the bridge then drove back east and checked all the traps. All empty. (At Creek I observed a large **Spiny Softshell Turtle** basking on the mud bank directly across the stream from one of the traps!)

June 20...Drove to Creek and hiway Floated downstream to the . Investigated the backwater areas but found them all to be too shallow for turtles but saw several **Leopard Frogs**. Paddled back up-stream.

June 21...Pulled all the traps at . Saw lots of **Painted Turtles!** Went to Creek and found an adult **Snapping Turtle** trying to get into the trap through the side! Caught it, examined it, and released it. While picking up the trap out of the stream I stepped to the left and placed my foot directly onto the back of a **huge Snapping Turtle** that was submerged nearby! I dropped the trap and captured that one too but it was too much of a struggle and I could barely lift it out of the water. Finally gave up and let it go when one of its back claws scratched and cut my skin! Pulled the trap and drove to the backwater at hiway . There observed 2 large **Blanding's Turtles** basking on a log in full view from the gravel road! Stopped and snuck up to take their picture. Next drove to and met . He gave me a tour of the property and pointed out some of the backwater areas and also informed me that he had been seeing **Blanding's Turtles** on a regular basis since they moved there 12 years before in 1990.

Last Day...(Date Un-Recorded)..Met Lisa at and the 3 of us walked around the property looking for turtles and checked out the backwater areas.