

Endangered, Threatened, and Special Concern Species of Minnesota

Protecting Blanding's Turtle Nests

(See also Blanding's Turtle Fact Sheet)

TURTLE NEST PREDATION

Often, as many as 80% of turtle nests can be lost to predators such as raccoon, skunk, fox, and opossum. Although predators may find and destroy nests at any point during the egg's development, most predation on turtle nests occurs within 5 days after the eggs are laid, and especially during the first 48 hours. As time passes, there is less scent associated with the nest, and it is more difficult for predators to locate the nest.



HOW TO PREVENT NEST PREDATION

Nests more than a week old probably do not need protection, unless they are in a particularly vulnerable spot, such as a yard where pets may disturb the nest. If you believe a nest on your property is in danger from predators or other disturbance, there are several methods you can use to protect the nest. These methods are designed either to attempt to prevent predators from digging up the nest, or to prevent predators from finding the nest.

① Nests can be covered with a piece of wire fencing (such as chicken wire), centered over the nest and secured to the ground with stakes or rocks.* The fencing should be at least 2 ft. x 2 ft. Mesh openings should be about 2 in. x 2 in.** →



←② A covered cylindrical or cone-shaped cage can be centered over the nest and anchored with hooked stakes*. Take *great care* to avoid piercing the nest cavity with the stakes! The cage should be at least 20 in. across and 10 in. high. Mesh openings should be about 2 in. x 2 in.**

All fencing around and over a nest **must be removed before August 1st** so the young turtles can escape from the nest when they hatch! If desired, the wire fencing and cages can be removed after only 30 days, as it is unlikely that a predator will find the nest at this point.

*Wire should be fastened down very securely with heavy rocks or long (8 -10 in.) stakes, to prevent predators from pulling it up.

** Mesh size should not be much larger than 2 in. x 2 in., as predators can reach through larger mesh and dig to the nest.

HOW TO PREVENT NEST PREDATION (cont.)

③ Nests can also be covered **temporarily** with plywood to provide short-term protection. The plywood **must be removed within five days** or the shading of the nest will cool the soil and prevent proper development of the eggs.

④ Masking the odor of the nest may prevent predators from finding it. You can try sprinkling the area with water, or putting a 1 in. layer of fresh sand over the nest location in an attempt to disguise the turtle smell.

HOW TO TELL IF TURTLES HAVE HATCHED

Eggshell fragments scattered near an unearthed nest indicate that the nest has been destroyed by predators. When eggs hatch successfully, the eggshells are left underground in the nest cavity. Successful eggs typically hatch between mid-August and early October, depending on when the eggs were laid and how warm the summer has been (turtle eggs are incubated by the heat of the sun). The hatchlings emerge through a small burrow they dig from the nest to the surface. If you cannot find the hole or burrow the hatchlings used to exit the nest, it could mean that the eggs failed to hatch. However, some turtles may hatch from the egg and then spend the winter in the nest, and not emerge until the following spring. This means that even if you do not see young turtles emerge from the nest in the fall, the nest still may have been successful.

SHARE YOUR STORY

If you would like to share the story of your nest protection efforts with us, please send details (and photos, if possible) to “Attn: MBS Herpetologist” at mbs.report@state.mn.us or Minnesota Biological Survey, 500 Lafayette Rd., Box 25, St. Paul, MN 55155; or contact the DNR Nongame Specialist nearest you: Bemidji (218-308-2641); Grand Rapids (218-328-8811); New Ulm (507-359-6033); Rochester (507-206-2820); or St. Paul (651-259-5772).