

BLANDING'S TURTLES in the Classroom

PROJECT SUMMARY

Grassroots Wildlife Conservation (GWC) is a non-profit that restores rare species populations by engaging the assistance of people who live near these rare animals and plants. We work with both adults and children; indeed thousands of school children and their teachers have helped us raise rare turtles, toads, salamanders, and wildflowers as part of our ecological restoration projects. To date, we have partnered with 46 different schools throughout eastern Massachusetts, with students from kindergarten through 12th grade.

This year, students from at least 18 Massachusetts schools will work with us to raise hatchlings of the threatened Blanding's turtle, a wildlife species that, like many others, has been declining sharply in recent decades. Together, we learn about turtle ecology, their adaptations for survival, and wildlife conservation efforts both globally and in each student's home town. Through engaging students in authentic scientific research, and connecting their efforts to a local problem, we provide the students with a way to apply the practice of science to everyday life. Our participating students learn that they can make a difference in a global environmental issue, the conservation of our natural heritage. Each hatchling turtle raised by the students has at least a 40 times better chance of surviving to adulthood because of the students' efforts.

With each participating class, we provide presentations about wildlife conservation, wetland ecology, and turtle biology. We lead most classes on field trips to local conservation areas to connect the classroom-based lessons to the habitats where the turtles live. At the end of the school year, students release their turtles back to the wild, some of which are more than 20 times their hatching size. Each year we catch many of our turtle "alumni", who are alive and thriving because of the efforts of our student and teacher as we catch many of our turtle "alumni", who are alive and thriving because of the efforts of our student and teacher partners.



HANDS-ON SCIENCE IN THE CLASSROOM

Raising an animal in the classroom can be a fun learning experience in itself, but raising rare Blanding's turtles gives students the added opportunity of participating in a real science project. Students weigh and measure the turtles, track their growth, and contribute to a growing body of data that shows that headstarting is a very effective conservation measure. The students and teachers have access to our project data and can form and investigate questions and hypotheses, such as: What factors best explain the rate at which each young turtle grows? Are there patterns in nest site selection or hatching success that varies among turtle mothers? How does nest temperature affect the likelihood that they the turtles are males or females? GWC works together with teachers and school science curriculum coordinators to develop lesson plans and provide students with engaging science learning opportunities that complement Massachusetts Science Standards while providing an opportunity to practice science in partnership with conservation research organizations. Among the organizations helping with our Massachusetts Blanding's turtle conservation programs are: Zoo New England, the New England Aquarium, US Fish and Wildlife Service, Mass. Division of Fisheries and Wildlife, and both Tufts and Harvard Universities.

GETTING KIDS OUTSIDE

Getting children outside is more important now than ever. Studies show that kids spend significantly less time outside than in previous generations, despite what we know about the cognitive and health benefits of exploring nature. GWC field trips are hand-on nature explorations, and give students the opportunity to see and touch live animals, use nets to sample aquatic animals, learn about field research skills such as radio-tracking, and participate in a real conservation science project.

Find out more about our work, our staff, and our conservation projects at www.grassrootswildlife.org

