Management tools include wetland conservation and restoration, and education of the well-meaning public.

Blanding's Turtle

(Photo by Dan Thompson.)

The Blanding's turtle, *Emydoidea blandingii*, is a unique reptile that is relatively unknown to many people. Its bright yellow throat and chin, domed shell, and permanent smile help distinguish this species from others.

A long-lived species, with accounts of individuals living more than 70 years, this turtle's life expectancy continually declines as human populations increase. Habitat loss and degradation, automobiles, unscrupulous collectors and accidental fishing-related deaths are just some of the factors that jeopardize the survival of this threatened Illinois species.

Conservation and restoration of wetlands and surrounding uplands for nesting will provide essential habitat, but education also plays a critical role as many Blanding's turtles are lost directly to human activity. Taking a wild turtle home, even temporarily, not only is a bad idea but also illegal in the case of this or any listed species. The use of artificial fishing lures instead of live bait in areas where Blanding's turtles are prevalent can greatly reduce losses.

Conservation, along with an educated public, will help to ensure that Blanding's turtles will be around to "smile" for future generations.

—**Dan Thompson**, Animal Ecologist, DuPage County Forest Preserve District

This little turtle with a down-to-earth name is one of Illinois' reptilian rarities.

Illinois Mud Turtle

(Photo by Randy Nÿboer.)

The Illinois mud turtle (*Kinosternon flavescens*) is not exactly a glamorous-sounding name for an endangered species, but this rare prairie turtle does garner a lot of attention.

A small, fist-sized reptile, the mud turtle has several physical attributes that make it easy to identify: the ninth marginal scute of the shell has a triangular shaped tip; four fleshy barbels on its chin create a "beard;" and, males have a distinctive claw at the tip of the tail.

Illinois mud turtles are now found mainly in the Green River and Illinois River sand areas where shallow ponds exist. Two Henry County farmers discovered they had this turtle on their land and allowed researchers and Department of Natural Resources biologists to study the turtle's secretive lives. Using radio transmitters attached to the turtles, biologists discovered nesting areas and summer and winter hibernation sites critical for the survival of this endangered species.

—**Randy Nÿboer**, Illinois Endangered Species Protection Board