



Red-Eared Slider

Taxonomy

Order: Reptilia

Family: Emydidae

Species: *Trachemys scripta elegans* (Wied-Neuwied)

Synonyms: *Trachemys elegans*

Summary

Native to the Eastern USA and Mexico, these terrapins or pond turtles are popular in the pet trade. Turtles frequently escape or are abandoned when they mature, and become established in freshwater habitats throughout the world, often breeding under suitable conditions. Their omnivorous diet and ability to adapt to various habitats, gives them great potential for impacting indigenous habitats



Red-eared Slider © Non-Native Species Secretariat, UK

Biology

The red-eared slider is an opportunistic omnivore subsisting on a wide variety of plants and animals including filamentous algae, macrophytes, snails, aquatic and terrestrial insects, crustaceans and small vertebrates

Red-eared slider turtles are active during the day (diurnal), resting on the bottom or floating on the surface at night. They can remain submerged for a considerable time.

Sexually mature from age three, females usually excavate a nest up to 12 cm deep on the shore of a freshwater body or on beaches. Up to six clutches a year containing up to 30 eggs (but usually 6-11) may be laid. Incubation of eggs takes 59 to 112 days, and hatching times are weather dependent: temperatures between 22°C to 30°C for 55 to 80 days are preferred. Longevity of pond sliders is approximately 20 years in the wild and 40 years in captivity.

Distribution in Caribbean

Common throughout the Caribbean region in disturbed and natural habitats. A small population are present in ponds in TCI.

Pathway of Entry

Natural dispersal: may disperse up to 2 km to lay eggs

Accidental/deliberate release: As they reach adulthood, many pet sliders are released by their owners into natural ecosystems. They are a food source in Asia.

Impact

Where they are invasive red-eared sliders compete with native species for food, egg-laying sites, or basking places and are occasionally aggressive towards other species. Competitive interactions between *T. scripta elegans* and the European pond turtle, *Emys orbicularis*, an endangered species have been recorded.

Pet turtles released into natural ecosystems increases the risk of parasite transmission to native species. The impacts of the red-eared slider on natural habitats and ecosystems are unknown; should the red-eared slider be released in natural habitats with high ecological value, it would be relevant to monitor any consequences on native fauna and flora, typically invertebrates, amphibians, native turtles and nesting birds.



Juvenile *T. scripta elegans* plastron (bottom of the shell) © Pradeep717 {{CC-BY-SA-2.0}}

Description

Red-eared sliders range from 10-29 cm, average female shell length in adulthood is 25.4 cm, 17.78 cm in males. Eggs are ovoid in shape, 31 to 43 millimetres long, 19 to 26 millimetres wide and weigh 6.1 to 15.4 grams. Hatchlings are usually 23-35 mm in shell length.

The upper portion of the shell (the carapace) is rough and oval-shaped with sharp edges. The colour ranges from greenish yellow to grey, brown, and black, with yellow lines often present. The bottom of the shell (the plastron) is flat and smooth, and it is usually yellow with black spots or streaks in the centre of each plastral scute (keratinous plate). The skin is dark green and brown with yellow stripes on the limbs, head and neck, and red stripes or 'ears' may be present behind the eye. Occasionally, the distinctive red stripe is missing or expressed only as a red patch on the top of the head. Older males exhibit melanism, which is the darkening of both the carapace and plastron in addition to the skin, making identification difficult.

Further Information:

- <https://www.cabi.org/isc/datasheet/61560>
- <https://nas.er.usgs.gov/queries/FactSheet.aspx?speciesID=1261>
- <http://issg.org/database/species/ecology.asp?si=71&fr=1&sts=&%20ang=FR&ver=print&prtflag=false>

Similar Species

Hybridization between species of pond turtle is very common, making identification very difficult. In the Cayman Islands, the North Antillean Slider (*T. decussata*) hybridises with *T. scripta elegans*. The Central Antillean slider (*T. stejnegeri*), is endemic to the West Indies, and superficially similar to *T. scripta elegans*.

Trachemys scripta consists of the three North American subspecies which vary by skin and plastron markings.

Cumberland sliders, *T. scripta troostii*, have thick yellow and black lines on their legs and yellow markings on their necks and behind their eyes. Yellow-bellied sliders, *T. scripta scripta*, have thin yellow and black lines on their necks and limbs, and yellow areas near their eyes. Two black spots are usually present on the plastrons.

