

# HOW TO KEEP YOUR RED-EARED SLIDER HEALTHY, HAPPY AND SAFE!

## Always

- Take a newly purchased red-eared slider to an exotic animal veterinarian for a wellness examination and fecal check for parasites.
- Feed turtles in a separate container from their living accommodations to reduce fouling of the water.
- Keep the water clean using a filter and weekly water changes.
- Provide heat with a daytime basking light and a submersible heater.
- Allow exposure to UV lighting during the day. UVA light encourages natural behaviors while UVB light supports overall health.
- Offer 12-14 hours per day of UVA and UVB basking light in the spring and summer to simulate a natural photoperiod.
- Offer 10-12 hours of UVA and UVB basking light in fall and winter.

## Housing for your red-eared slider should:

- be a 10-20 gallon tank for hatchlings and a 60-125 gallon tank for adults
- have a water level 6 inches below the top of the tank to prevent escapes
- be predator proof
- include a stable area where the turtle can crawl out of the water and bask
- be easy to clean with good filtration
- maintain a proper water temperature of 75-86° F (23.8-30° C) (higher end for hatchlings, lower end for adults)
- maintain an air temperature of at least 75° F (24° C) with a basking area temperature of 85-90° F (29.5 - 32° C)

## It is important for a red-eared slider to avoid:

- being housed in a little plastic "island bowl"
- water temperatures below 75°F (24°C)
- habitats lacking a dry basking area
- being fed shrimp or muscle meat as the staple diet
- cats, dogs or other predators
- dirty water
- having gravel or any substrate in the tank smaller than the size of the turtle's head to prevent foreign body ingestion
- being too close to the top of the enclosure (so they can escape) or housed in insufficient water



## Most Common Disorders of Red-eared Sliders

- Septicemic cutaneous ulcerative disease (SCUD), also commonly referred to as shell rot, presents as a pink to red discoloration of the skin and/or shell
- Soft shell, poor growth, shell doming/pyramiding due to a type of metabolic bone disease or other nutritional deficiency
- Dysecdysis (retained scutes on shell)
- Shell "fuzz" due to algae or mineral deposits from poor water quality
- Swollen/closed eyes (hypovitaminosis A)
- Respiratory infection (gasping for air; blowing bubbles out of nose, neck stretching)
- Ear abscesses
- Circular/erratic swimming, abnormal buoyancy, irregular walking
- Cloacal prolapse (cloaca, colon, bladder or uterus, must be differentiated from normal phallic fanning in males)
- Egg binding
- Parasites
- Anorexia (a sign of many medical disorders)
- Diarrhea
- Foreign body ingestion leading to impaction
- Trauma (shell fractures, wounds)

Regular visits to your reptile veterinarian should be scheduled to check for parasites and other early signs of disease and to promote a long, satisfying relationship with your turtle. For help in finding a reptile veterinarian in your area, contact the Association of Reptilian and Amphibian Veterinarians (ARAV) by visiting [www.ARAV.org](http://www.ARAV.org) and click on "Find a Vet" or the American Board of Veterinary Practitioners by visiting [www.ABVP.com/diplomate](http://www.ABVP.com/diplomate).

## Additional reading:

*The General Care and Maintenance of Red Eared Sliders and Other Popular Freshwater Turtles*, Philippe de Vosjoli  
*Turtles of the World*, Carl H. Ernst and Roger W. Barbour  
*Life History and Ecology of the Slider Turtle*, J.W. Gibbons  
*Keeping and Breeding Freshwater Turtles*, Russ Gurley  
*Turtles of the United States and Canada*, Carl H. Ernst, Jeffery E. Lovich, Roger W. Barbour



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## RED-EARED SLIDER

The red-eared slider (*Trachemys scripta elegans*) is one of the best known and most popular freshwater turtles in captivity. A broad stripe that starts at the end of the eye and extends over the ear area is characteristic of these turtles and varies in color from red to orange/yellow. Their name also relates to their habit of sliding off rocks and logs when startled. A native of the United States, they are found naturally from West Virginia to northern Indiana and Illinois, south to western Georgia and through Texas to northern Mexico as well as eastern New Mexico.

A body of fresh water with an abundance of aquatic vegetation is suitable habitat for sliders. In the wild, they prefer water deep enough in which to swim (2+ feet in depth) and can often be seen basking on objects floating in or projecting out of the water.

Hatchlings are commonly sold in the pet trade, despite the fact that the FDA Center for Veterinary Medicine established a law prohibiting the sale of live turtles under 4 inches in length. Baby turtles require specialized habitats (complete with heating, lighting and filtration) and a proper diet in order for them to survive.

Juveniles can potentially grow into large (up to 12 inches) demanding pets, requiring very large habitats and expensive filtration equipment. They can be rewarding to keep but can also require a considerable amount of time from their owners.

### What to Expect from Your Red-eared Slider

Red-eared sliders are attractive, intelligent and fascinating turtles, which interact with their owners in engaging and friendly ways. Because they require special care, maintaining them properly demands dedication and knowledge about a well designed semiaquatic habitat.

### Is Your Red-eared Slider a Male or Female?

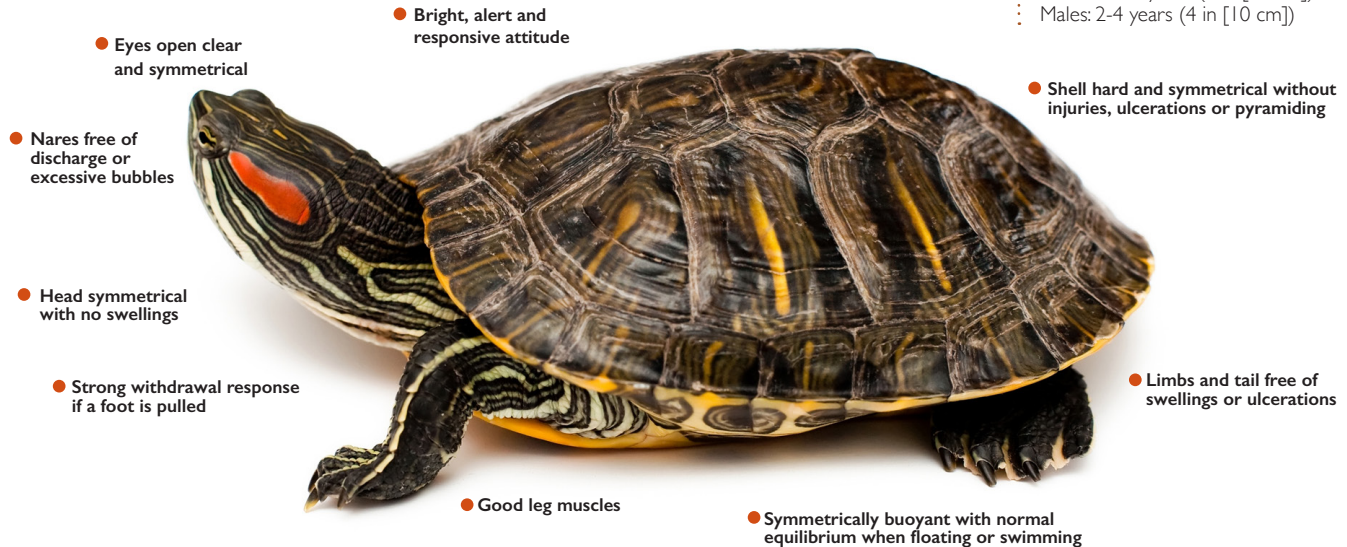
Red-eared sliders, especially juveniles, can be difficult to sex. Gender in adults is determined by external physical characteristics and behavior. In comparison to females, males have longer foreclaws (which are used in courtship), a longer tail, a longer distance from the body to the vent opening, a tail that is thicker at the base, and generally a smaller body size and shell length.

### What Should You Feed Your Turtle?

In the wild, red-eared sliders are omnivorous; however, juveniles are mainly carnivorous and become more herbivorous as they mature. Up to 40 % protein should be offered for juveniles. Plant matter, in the form of chopped leafy greens or finely chopped mixed vegetables, may be offered once weekly but may not be readily accepted until the turtle grows older.

For adults, 25-50% of the diet may consist of commercial turtle pellets and animal protein. Sources of this animal protein include earthworms, mealworms, feeder fish, and guppies. Other meats should be only offered as rare treats and may be used to administer vitamin supplements. The remaining 50-75% should consist of chopped plant matter, such as kale, romaine, red leaf lettuce, dandelion, watercress, parsley, green leaf lettuce, zucchini, sweet potato, shredded carrot, shredded squash and thawed frozen mixed vegetables. Live aquatic plants (duckweed, water lily, water lettuce, water fern, water hyacinth) may be healthy additions to a captive red-eared slider's diet. Fruit

## WHAT YOUR VETERINARIAN LOOKS FOR IN A HEALTHY RED-EARED SLIDER



**NOTE: Most, if not all, reptiles carry Salmonella bacteria in their intestinal tract and intermittently or continuously shed these bacteria in their feces, so they are unsuitable pets for very young children and those with compromised immune systems. Good hygiene must always be practiced around all reptiles, including Red-Eared Sliders. For more information, please see the handout, Salmonella Information for Reptile Owners at <http://arav.org/special-topics/>.**



should be offered only as a rare treat. Adding a good quality vitamin supplement is recommended. The advice of a qualified reptile veterinarian should be sought for the type and frequency of synthetic vitamin supplementation to prevent toxicity.

Hatchlings and juveniles should be fed on a daily basis; however, it is best to offer them no more than they will consume during a single session (approximately 15 minutes) in order to minimize water contamination. Adults may be fed every 2-3 days. The normal behavior for a red-eared slider includes aggressive begging for food. This must be ignored to avoid overfeeding.

### Enclosure

The minimum enclosure size for a hatchling red-eared slider should be a 30-gallon aquarium. Ten gallons of water is recommended per 1 inch (2.54 cm) of shell length. As a general rule, the water depth should be at least 2 times the turtle's carapace length to prevent drowning if the turtle should flip over and not be able to right itself. There should be at least 6 inches of air space between the surface of the water to the top edge of the tank in order to prevent escapes as they are very determined climbers.

### Water Quality and Filtration

Sliders are voracious feeders and tend to foul the water quickly with their messy eating habits and frequent defecation. Consider feeding in a separate tank. Compared with other aquatic animals, turtles excrete increased waste material; therefore, stronger filtration systems and regular cleaning schedules are required for management of water quality. Partial to full water changes may be performed. Many different filtration systems are available.

### Basking Site

Basking areas, where the turtle can easily emerge from the water to bask under a heat source providing temperatures of 90-95°F (32-35°C), may consist of either islands or platforms established at the water line of the tank. Alternatively, basking surfaces areas may be built from the bottom of the tank with bricks or stones insuring that they are stable and will not collapse onto the turtle.

### Vital Statistics

#### Body length:

Females: 10-12 in (25-30 cm)

Males: 7-9 in (18-23 cm)

#### Life span: 15-25+ years

#### Age/length at sexual maturity:

Females: 3-5 years (5 in [13 cm])

Males: 2-4 years (4 in [10 cm])