

## Basic Information Sheet: Red-Eared Slider

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Date: February 25, 2011; reviewed and updated July 12, 2012

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Keywords: **natural history, omnivore, semi-aquatic, taxonomy**

Categories: **Reptiles & Amphibians, Turtles & Tortoises, Resources & Education**

### Red-Eared Slider (*Trachemys scripta*)

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#### Natural history

Red-eared sliders are native to the eastern and central United States river valleys. Most pet sliders are captive bred and hatched. Red-eared sliders are hardy and outgoing.

Although pretty and personable as pets, red-eared sliders occupy a

niche of dark history in herpetoculture, first as transmitters of [Salmonella](#) bacteria to small children, second as an invasive species that have disturbed ecosystems throughout the waterways of the world. The former problem is the result of husbandry and marketing practices of large-scale commercial producers; the latter due to illegal release of unwanted pets.

## Taxonomy

**Class:** *Reptilia*

**Order:** *Chelonia/Testudines*

**Family:** *Emydidae*

**Genus:** *Trachemys*

## Color and Size

Young red-eared sliders are bright green with yellow markings and a red stripe just behind the eyes. Colors dull with age.

Male red-eared sliders are smaller than females, but they have longer tails. Adults typically range from 5-9 inches (13-23 cm) in length, although females may reach 12-13 in (30-33 cm).

## Diet

Red-eared sliders are omnivores. Juveniles require a higher proportion of animal protein, while adults consume more plant matter. Generally, young healthy sliders or sick [hospitalized](#) sliders do best when fed commercial pelleted foods and then offered snacks for variety. For long-term care of healthy adults, feed more plant material to control calorie intake:

- Dark, leafy greens such as collard, mustard, and dandelion greens make up the bulk

(40%-60%) of the adult diet. Mix greens with coarsely chopped vegetables such as carrots, squash, green beans, and broccoli.

- Offer a commercial turtle diet, such as sticks, pellets, or trout chow as 25%-50% of the diet.
- Animal protein sources may include live feeder fish, earthworms, cooked chicken, or earthworms purchased from a reputable supplier.
- Fruit, such as apple, cantaloupe, melon, and berries, can be offered as an occasional treat.

Feed adults once every 2-3 days; juveniles require daily feeding. Feed sliders in the water.

Aquatic turtles are messy eaters and foods can interfere with the filters needed to keep turtle tanks clean. Pet sliders may be fed in a separate tank in which water can be discarded after each meal.

## Husbandry

Temperature	Maintain water temperature between 75-80°F (24-27°C), with the help of a submersible aquarium heater. The basking area should reach between 84-94°F (29-34°C). Fortunately sliders are hardy turtles that can thrive
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	in cooler and warmer environs.
Humidity/water	See below
Cage size and design	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• House these turtles in a large aquarium. A single adult will need a 50-gallon aquarium minimum.</li> <li>• These freshwater turtles require both a large pool of water as well as an area of dry land for basking. Because sliders are agile climbers, be sure to include a screen top to prevent escape.</li> <li>• As a general rule of thumb, provide hatchlings with 3-6 in (7.5-15 cm) of tap water. Large juveniles and adults need between 10-30 inches (20-60 cm) of</li> </ul>

	<p>water. The body of water needs to be at least 4-5 times the turtle's carapace length and the water's depth should be at least 1.5-2 times shell length.</p>
<p>Cage furniture/supplies</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Provide a dry haul-out area at one end of the enclosure using hardwood, pieces of cork, or a smooth, flat rock resting on submerged bricks or cinder block. Rough rocks can scratch the turtle's shells creating a risk of infection. Create enough of an incline so the turtle can climb out easily, and position an overhead light over one corner of the haul-out area</li></ul>

	<p>to provide the basking spot.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Aquatic turtles are messy eaters and they often defecate in their water so it is important to maintain water quality. Perform frequent 50%-100% water changes or use a high quality filter and feed the turtle in a separate habitat.</li> <li>• Provide a full-spectrum light for optimal absorption of dietary calcium.</li> </ul>
Social structure	Red-eared sliders are communal and may do best when housed in groups.

## Lifespan

Average lifespan ranges from 15-25 years although sliders can live much, much longer.

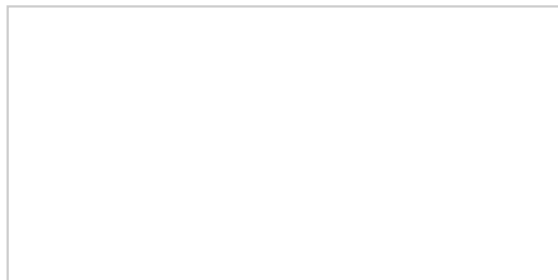
The age of sexual maturity depends more on size rather than age.

Turtles grow at varied rates

depending on the availability and quality of food. Males reach sexual maturity about the time their carapace (upper shell) length reaches 4 inches (10 cm), which tends to be anywhere from 2-5 years. Females become sexually mature about the time the carapace reaches 6-7 in (15-18 cm) in length, which can take up to 5-7 years.

## **Anatomy/ physiology**

- Chelonians possess a tough, horny beak instead of teeth.
- The shell consists of bony plates covered with keratinized shields called scutes. The upper shell is called the “carapace” and the bottom shell is the “plastron”.
- There is a relatively short trachea with complete tracheal rings. The lungs are large and sac-like with many septa. The lungs occupy the upper half of the coelomic cavity, and usually extend along its entire length. Total lung volume changes with head and neck position, and may decrease by 20-30% when the head and neck are drawn inside the shell.
- Turtles have a thin-walled, very distensible, bilobed bladder.
- A single, large, smooth phallus sits on the cloacal floor.
- Males have a longer, thicker tail and a more concave plastron.





Normal, smooth plastron or bottom shell in a turtle. The lack of concavity suggests this turtle is female. Photo by Toby Otter. *Click image to enlarge.*

## **Restraint**

Sliders are easily held by the shell, however some individuals will scratch with their claws or reach their long necks around and bite the handler. It can be challenging to extend the head and neck even in the weak slider.

Always wash your hands after handling turtles due to the risk of [salmonellosis](#).

## **Venipuncture**

Jugular vein (the right vein is often larger than the left)  
Brachial artery/distal humeral plexus

## **Preventive medicine**

Regular physical examination

## **Important medical conditions**

*\*\*Login to view references\*\**

Red-eared sliders are very hardy. Problems seen in captivity can include:

- Pneumonia
- Skin and shell infections



## References

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## To cite this page:

Pollock C. Basic information sheet: Red-eared slider. July 12, 2012. LafeberVet Web site. Available at <https://lafeber.com/vet/basic-information-red-eared-slider/>



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