

The red-eared slider (Trachemys scripta elegans) is the best known and most popular freshwater turtle in captivity. Their name is attributed to a broad red stripe behind the eye and 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.

Almost any body of fresh water with an abundance of aquatic vegetation is suitable habitat for the slider. 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 has set regulations 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, and certain minimum requirements must be met in order for them to survive. Juveniles can potentially grow into large (up to 12") demanding pets, requiring very large habitats and expensive filtration equipment. They can be extremely rewarding to keep, but can also require a considerable amount of time from their owners.

Zoological Education Network provides educational materials about exotic companion animals.

Most Common Disorders of Red-eared Sliders

Swollen eyes due to hypovitaminosis A

Soft shell, poor growth, or shell doming due to metabolic bone disease

Ear abscesses

Gasping for air, neck stretching or abnormal buoyancy due to respiratory infections

Shell "fuzz" due to poor water quality

Shell infections

Red flush to plastron due to septicemia

Prolapsed phallus

Trauma:

Shell fractures, wounds from fighting or abrasions on rocks or other objects

Having your red-eared slider examined on a regular basis by an exotic animal veterinarian who is familiar with reptiles can prevent many of the common disorders listed above and result in your having a long, satisfying relationship with your turtle.

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RED-EARED SLIDER



Companion Reptile Care
S E R I E S

What to Expect from Your Red-eared Slider

Red-eared sliders are attractive, intelligent and fascinating turtles that require special care. Maintaining them properly demands dedication and knowledge. In a well-designed habitat, turtles will

delight their owners with their appearance and remarkable behaviors.

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 com-

parison to females, males have longer foreclaws (which are used in courtship), a longer tail length, 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, eating both animal and plant sources of food. However, juveniles are mainly carnivorous and become more herbivorous as they mature.

In captivity, the diet for juveniles should consist primarily of a commercial aquatic turtle pellet. Hatchlings and juveniles should be fed on a daily basis; however, they should be offered no more than they will consume during a single session to minimize water contamination. The diet can be supplemented with occasional live fish of an appropriate size (guppies, goldfish), tubifex worms and earthworms. Plant matter, in the form of chopped leafy greens or finely chopped mixed vegetables, can be offered once weekly but may not be readily accepted until they grow older.

For adults, 50% of the diet may consist of commer-

cial turtle pellets and animal-based protein as per the juvenile diet. The remaining 50% should consist of chopped plant matter, such as kale, romaine, red leaf lettuce, mustard greens, dandelion, watercress, parsley, Swiss chard, shredded carrot, shredded squash, thawed frozen mixed vegetables and miscellaneous fruits. Adults can be fed every 2-3 days.

Enclosure

The minimum enclosure size for a hatchling red-eared slider should be a 20-gallon aquarium. As a general rule, the water depth should be at least 1.5-2 times the turtle's carapace length, with several extra inches of air space between the surface of the water to the top edge of the tank to prevent escapes. For 4- to 5-inch (10-13 cm) long sliders, the recommended minimum enclosure surface area is 2.5 square feet (0.23 m²) with an extra square foot (0.09 m²) for each additional turtle. Space should be doubled for turtles 8 inch (20 cm) long or greater.

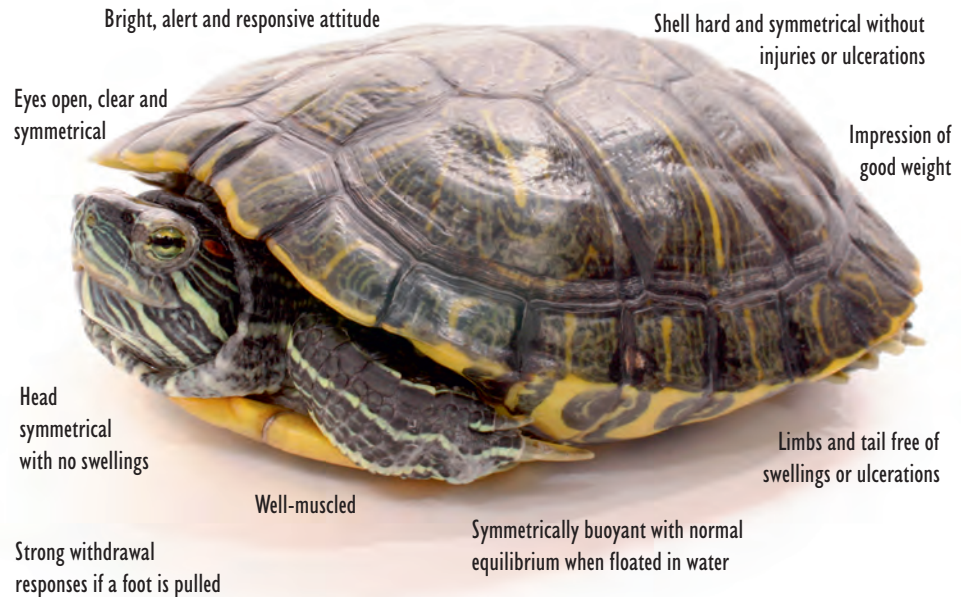
Water Quality and Filtration

Sliders are voracious feeders and tend to foul the water quickly with their messy eating habits and frequent defecation. Therefore, a system needs to be in place for management of water quality. Partial to full water changes can be performed. Many different filtration systems are available.

Basking Site

Basking areas, where the turtle can emerge from the water to bask under a heat source, can consist of either islands or platforms established at the water line of the tank or of areas built from the bottom of the tank (bricks or stones) and emerging from the surface.

What Your Veterinarian Looks for in a Healthy Red-eared Slider



How to Keep Your Red-eared Slider Healthy, Happy and Safe!

- ✓ 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 UVB lighting during the day.
- ✓ Offer 12-14 hours per day of basking light in the spring and summer to simulate a natural photoperiod.
- ✓ Offer 10-12 hours of daylight in fall and winter.

Housing for your red-eared slider should:

- ✓ be at least a 20-gallon (30" long x 12" wide x 12" high [76 x 30 x 30 cm]) sized enclosure for juveniles
- ✓ be escape-proof and predator-proof
- ✓ include an 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 82-85°F (28-29.5°C) for hatchlings or 75-85°F (24-29.5°C) for adults with an air temperature of 85-90°F (29.5-32°C) under the basking light

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
- ✗ being too close to the top of the enclosure (they can escape)

NOTE: Anyone who handles turtles should wash their hands thoroughly afterwards to reduce the potential for salmonellosis.