



Invasive Species Fact Sheet

Red-eared slider, *Trachemys scripta elegans*

General Description

RES are medium-sized freshwater turtles. Their top shell (carapace) and skin are olive to brown in color with yellow stripes. Their bottom shell (plastron) is usually yellow, although sometimes brownish orange, and has dark spots within the center of each shell plate (scute). RES can typically be distinguished by the thick red stripe behind each of their eyes, although some individuals lose their colorful skin and shell stripes over time and appear dark overall (melanistic). Unlike the smooth-edged shell of California's native western pond turtle (*Actinemys marmorata*), the marginal scutes of RES are serrated or slightly forked in appearance. Male sliders have thick tails, elongated front claws, and are usually smaller than females. Adult RES can range from approximately 5 to 11 inches in length. In captivity, they can live for up to 40 years or up to 20 years in the wild.



Red-eared slider
Photo by Anna Ewing, CDFW

Current Distribution

RES are common in numerous counties throughout California including, but not limited to: Butte, Contra Costa, Kern, Lake, Los Angeles, Marin, Riverside, Sacramento, San Diego, San Luis Obispo, San Francisco, Santa Barbara, Santa Clara, Shasta, Tulare, Ventura, Yuba, and Yolo counties. The native range of RES includes the Mississippi Valley from Illinois to the Gulf of Mexico and extends as far east as West Virginia and as far west as eastern New Mexico. RES have been introduced to many areas of the United States outside of their native range, as well as to other countries and are listed as one of the world's worst 100 invasive species.

Habitat Preference

RES occupy a variety of natural freshwater habitats, including streams, rivers, ponds, lakes, swamps, and marshes. They can also be found in manmade habitats such as ditches, canals, and park lakes/ponds. RES prefer slow-moving waters that have soft bottoms and contain an abundance of aquatic vegetation and basking sites. RES are often found in close proximity to urban areas due to higher incidence of pet releases.

Pathways

RES were originally, and continue to be, introduced to new areas primarily through the domestic and international pet trade. More than 52 million individual sliders were exported from the United States to international markets between 1989 and 1997. Pet sliders are typically introduced into the wild by escaping or being released by their owners. RES have also been introduced to new areas during transport for the commercial (live) food trade, and through intentional, ceremonial releases by some cultures and religions.

Impacts

Introduced RES compete with native species for food and habitat. For example, in California and the other Pacific states, sliders compete with native western pond turtles for food, egg-laying sites, and basking sites. RES are also vectors of disease and can transmit parasites to native animal species, as well as the bacteria *Salmonella* to humans. The sale and distribution of viable eggs and all small turtles (shell length less than 4 inches) was banned, excepting educational and research purposes, in the United States in 1975 after public health investigations showed that small turtles were a major source of human *Salmonella* infections. Over time, the extensive use of antibiotics within turtle hatcheries has resulted in the development of antibiotic-resistant strains of *Salmonella*, further exacerbating the threat to humans, if spread. Introduced populations expand rapidly, with female RES able to lay up to 6 clutches/year, each containing up to 30 eggs.

Actions Taken if Found

A valid sportfishing license is required to take RES, though there is no limit per person. Please do not take live RES from the environment unless you are prepared to keep it in captivity for the remainder of its lifespan. If you have a RES you can no longer care for, give it to a friend or contact your local shelter or reptile rescue organization. Do not release or relocate RES, as it is illegal to place, or cause to be placed, any aquatic plant or animal into the waters of the state (FGC sec. 6400). If you observe this species in California and would like to record your observation for tracking purposes, you may report your sighting to the CDFW Invasive Species Program at www.wildlife.ca.gov/Conservation/Invasives/report, by email to Invasives@wildlife.ca.gov, or by calling (866) 440-9530.

Invasive Species Fact Sheet – *Trachemys scripta elegans*

References

- Benson, A.J., C.C. Jacono, P.L. Fuller, E.R. McKercher, and M.M. Richerson. 29 February 2004. *Summary Report of Nonindigenous Aquatic Species in U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Region 5*. Retrieved 25 April 2012 from the U.S. Geological Survey website: http://fl.biology.usgs.gov/Region_5_Report/index.html.
- Bergmire-Sweat, D.J., Schlegel, K. Winpisinger, C. Perry, M. Sotir, and J. Harris. 24 January 2008. *Multistate Outbreak of Human Salmonella Infections Associated with Exposure to Turtles - United States, 2007-2008*. Retrieved 1 May 2012 from the Center for Disease Control and Prevention website: <http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/mm5703a3.htm>.
- Bettelheim, M. 2011. *Western Pond Turtles: Basking in Their Own Resiliency*. *Outdoor California* 72(2):22-31.
- Bettelheim, M.P., R.B. Bury, L.C. Patterson, and G.M. Lubcke. 2006. *Trachemys Scripta Elegans (Red-eared Slider) Reproduction*. *Herpetological Review*, 37(4):459-460.
- Bury, R.B. 2008. *Do Urban Areas Favor Introduced Turtles in Western North America?* *Herpetological Conservation* 3:343-345.
- Global Invasive Species Database. 26 May 2010. *Trachemys scripta elegans (reptile)*. Retrieved on 25 April 2012 from <http://www.issg.org/database/species/ecology.asp?si=71&fr=1&sts=sss&lang=EN>.
- Grijalva, L. 16 October 2002. *The Biogeography of the Red-eared Slider (Trachemys scripta elegans)*. Retrieved 25 April 2012 from the San Francisco State University Department of Geography and Human Environmental Studies website <http://bss.sfsu.edu/holzman/courses/Fall01%20projects/reslider.htm>.
- Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife. *Red-eared slider fact sheet*. Retrieved 25 April 2012 from http://www.dfw.state.or.us/conservationstrategy/invasive_species/red-eared_slider.asp.
- Somma, L.A., A. Foster, and P. Fuller. 28 October 2009. *Trachemys scripta elegans*. Retrieved on 25 April 2012 from the U.S. Geological Survey Nonindigenous Aquatic Species Database: <http://nas.er.usgs.gov/queries/CollectionInfo.aspx?SpeciesID=1261>.
- Thomson, R.C., P.Q. Spinks, and H.B. Shaffer. 2010. *Distribution and Abundance of Invasive Red-eared Sliders (Trachemys scripta elegans) in California's Sacramento River Basin and Possible Impacts on Native Western Pond Turtles (Emys marmorata)*. *Chelonian Conservation and Biology* 9(2): 297-302.