



Western New York Herpetological Society

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Common Name: Red Ear Slider

Latin Name: *Trachemys scripta elegans*

Native to: Originally from the Mississippi River to Gulf of Mexico. However they are now found world wide due to people releasing them into the wild.

Size: Males can reach 7 - 9 inches on average where females reach 7 - 12 inches. Contrary to popular myth, red ear sliders do not stay small if kept in a small enclosure.

Life span: In the wild red ear sliders can live up to 20 years and there have been reports of them living up to 40 years in captivity.

General appearance: As hatchlings they are bright green with yellow and red stripes extending from the eye to the rear. As they grow however the color will change to a dark green and their colors will fade. Males will have longer front claws and thicker tail where as females have thinner tails and are larger in size.

Housing requirements:

Enclosure: Red ear sliders need a lot of room. The general rule of thumb is 1 inch of shell per 10 gallons of water (so a 4 inch turtle should have 40 gallons tank). There are a variety of enclosures that have been used successfully. The most common is either glass or acrylic aquariums. Preformed ponds, stock tanks, and storage containers may also be used for an enclosure. Whatever is used, care should be taken that is escape proof for the red ear slider and predator proof to prevent other animals getting in the enclosure. A screen top on top of the enclosure is a good way to achieve this. Screen mesh should have ½ inch grids. If the grids are any smaller it may obstruct any UVB rays that are being directed in.

Temperature: Water temperature should be 78° - 80° F for hatchling red ear sliders while adults prefer it at 72° - 76°. Day time air temperature should be 75° - 80° F with a basking area air temperature should be 85° - 90°. Either two thermometers on either side of the enclosure or infra-red thermometer may be used to get an accurate temperature.

Heat/Light: UV lighting providing UVA and UVB for proper calcium metabolism and skeletal development of the red ear slider. This may be achieved by Mercury Vapor bulb or fluorescent bulb with at least 5% - 10% output of UVB. Sunlight is the best source of UVB. Incandescent lights and ceramic emitters may be used to provide basking spots. Water temperature may be heated with a submersible water heater at 3-5 watts per gallon.

Substrate: No substrate is needed for red ear slider enclosures. Many people feel it is easier to clean and improves filter performance. If you would like a more natural feel for our slider you can use river rocks (large, smooth rocks) or sand. Gravel should **NOT** be used because can be ingested by the red ear slider and cause blockage and prolapsed rectum.

Environment: Filtration is a must with red ear sliders. The general rule is you want a filter three times more powerful than what would generally be used for an aquarium for fish. A basking area should be provided so the slider can climb out and fully dry their shell. This can be achieved by bricks, cinder block, cork bark, driftwood, grapevine, fixed PVC, as well as a wide array of commercially made basking platforms. If you have a female slider, you may also want to provide an area with moist soil for them to dig and lay eggs. If there is nowhere is available to dig, females may retain the eggs which can cause health problems. Hiding areas are used by many turtles and should be provided in the enclosure. Please keep in mind that these should be stable so they do not trap the slider and cause it to drown.

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Diet: Red ear sliders are omnivorous (eat both plant material and animal protein). Hatchlings require their diet to be about 50% protein while adults should have only 10% - 25%. When feeding your slider a good rule to follow is to only offer as much food as the size of their head. Even though they may beg this is usually enough food and too much food can result in shell pyramiding, liver failure, or kidney failure. Commercially made aquatic turtle pellets, trout chow, or rehydrated high quality cat food are available but should not be fed exclusively. Live foods such as apple snails, pond snails, guppies, rosy reds, crickets, earthworms, and silkworms can be offered on a regular basis. Brine shrimp, ghost shrimp, blood worms, Krill, wax worms, gammerus, may be offered as treats as well. Goldfish should be avoided because that they contain thiaminase, an enzyme that destroys vitamin B1. Red ear sliders should also have plant matter in their diet as well. Dandelion greens, green and red leaf lettuce, turnip greens should be offered regularly. A small amount of carrots, endive, escarole, chicory greens, kale, green beans, romaine lettuce, squash, zucchini, sweet potato, and pumpkin may also be used as a treat. Many aquatic plants such as Amazon swords, anacharis, Duckweed, water fern, water hyacinth, frog bit, hornwort, water nasturtium, pond weed, water lettuce, water lily, water milfoil, and water starwort can be offered as well. Vitamins should be offered every third feeding. Cuttle bones can also be offered as a natural supply of calcium.

Maintenance: Water should be clear, however regular water testing and water changes should be performed on a regular basis. Many people find that feeding the red ear slider in a separate container helps maintain the water quality. Waste water should not be emptied into a sink that is used for food preparation or personal hygiene. Hands and any other part of your body that comes in contact with the water should be washed thoroughly with anti-bacterial soap when finished handling the slider or any of its cage accessories.

Other references or recommended reading:

Gurley, Russ. Keeping and Breeding Freshwater Turtles. Living Art Publishing. 2003.

Highfield, A.C. Practical Encyclopedia of Keeping and Breeding Freshwater Turtles and Tortoises. Carapace Press. 1996.

Highfield A.C. "Red-Eared Sliders: Basic Facts and Health Care" 1995-2002. Retrieved 2008-06-02 <http://www.tortoisetrust.org/articles/res.html>

Senneke, Darrell. "Trachemys scripta (Slider) Care" 2003-2006 retrieved 2008-05-31 <http://www.chelonia.org/Articles/trachemyscare.html>

Coy, Thomas. "Red Ear Slider" Retrieved 2008-06-02 http://www.austinsturtlepage.com/Care/caresheet-red_ear_slider.html

"All About Red Ear Sliders" 2005-2007. Retrieved 2008-06-02. <http://www.redearslider.com>

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