Red-eared Slider

Drs. Foster & Smith Educational Staff

Red-eared Sliders are part of the Emydidae family. An aquatic turtle, the Red-eared Slider is cold-blooded and a strong swimmer. They are very popular as pets in the United States, but they are not suitable pets for children. They require a high level of care that children are not able to provide, and if they are bought for children, a parent must be the primary caretaker.

Species Profile: Red-eared Slider

Scientific Name: *Chrysemys scripta elegans*

Natural Environment: United States (Illinois to the Gulf of Mexico, East coast to Western Texas).

Average Size: Up to 12" in diameter (carapace).

Average Life Span: 50 to 70 years.

Appearance: Red-eared Sliders have green skin with bright yellow stripes. They have a patch of red behind each eye on the sides of their heads, and some have a small red patch on the tops of their heads. The carapace, or shell, is yellow or olive green with yellow-green to dark green lines or patches. Parts of the shell can be white, yellow, or red.

There are two additional color morphs. One is a pastel strain that is characterized by a light shell with varying amounts of red and yellow. The other is an albino strain that starts out bright yellow when the turtle is a juvenile and fades throughout its life.

Males tend to be smaller than females, and they have longer

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tails. Both sexes have webbed feet and strong claws.

Habitat

Size: A turtle with a 4" carapace length (CL) will need a minimum of a 20 gallon aquarium. A full-grown turtle with a 12" CL will need a 120 gallon aquarium.

Lighting: Use UVA and UVB fluorescent lighting to provide a more naturally lit environment, warm the basking area, and enhance Vitamin D-3 production. An infrared bulb may be used to maintain the heat in the aquarium if it is kept in a cool room. All bulbs must be mounted securely outside the aquarium and above the screened top to prevent accidents.

Red-eared Sliders need a 12 hour light/dark cycle, so all lights used should be put on a timer.

Temperature: The air should be about 75°F, with an 85° to 90°F basking area. The water should be between 75° and 86°F. Use thermometers to make sure the temperatures are where they should be and a submersible aquarium heater to maintain the water temperatures.

Housing: The aquarium will need a screened top. Avoid using plastic plants, as the Red-eared Sliders will attempt to eat them. The water should be at least 1½ to 2 times as deep as the measurement of the CL. For example, an 8" turtle will need water that is at least 12" to 16" deep.

The quality of the water will be crucial to your Red-eared Slider's overall health, and we recommend using a water filter and changing 25% to 50% of the water weekly. Never put the aquarium in direct sunlight, as this will encourage algae growth, but put it in a room that does receive sunlight.

Create basking areas by using ramps, docks, soil, or gravel or by gluing corkbark, driftwood, or plexiglass to the side of the aquarium. A platform of stable, smooth rocks, driftwood, or slate can also make a good basking area. Gravel can be used in the bottom of the tank and should be sloped up to the basking areas for easy access. However, using substrates like gravel in the water area can make cleaning the habitat more difficult.

Substrate: Large, smooth aquarium gravel.

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Diet/Feeding:	Juvenile Red-eared Sliders are mostly carnivorous and should be fed daily. Adult Sliders are omnivorous and should be fed every other day. An adult Slider's diet should be made up of 25% commercial aquatic turtle diet, 25% animal protein, and 50% plant material. Some examples of animal protein are crickets, mealworms, bloodworms, and the occasional feeder fish. Plant material can include dandelions, green beans, sweet potatoes, bananas, and grapes. All food should be dusted with a calcium and vitamin supplement with plenty of Vitamin D-3, such as ReptoCal. Because Red-eared Sliders are very messy eaters, we recommend moving them to separate eating areas outside their aquarium for their meals. After you put your Slider in the feeding area, allow it to feed for 15 minutes, then move it back to its aquarium.
Behavior/Interaction:	Before attempting to interact with your Red-eared Slider, allow it to become comfortable in its new home. Once it has acclimated, it will associate you with food, and learn to look forward to seeing you. Be sure to handle your Slider carefully, with two hands, and never allow children under the age of five to handle it. Always wash your hands before and after handling your Slider. On warm, sunny days, your Slider may enjoy going outside to swim and bask. Always have both land and water areas available for it, and monitor the situation carefully to prevent overheating.
Interesting Facts:	Red-eared Sliders burrow into the earth to hibernate during the winter. As Sliders age, their shells can darken, the lines and patches disappearing, until they are a uniform dark olive green or greenish brown.

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