

# Red-eared slider turtle

*Trachemys scripta elegans*



Native to the USA, the red-eared slider is a freshwater turtle with a distinctive red strip behind each ear. Red-eared sliders are very aggressive and will out-compete native species for food and space. They can carry diseases that will threaten our own native turtles. The International Union for Conservation of Nature lists the red-eared slider as one of the world's 100 worst invasive alien species.

Red-eared slider turtles have been distributed through the illegal pet trade, and feral populations have now established on every continent except Antarctica.

## Legal requirements

The red-eared slider turtle is a category 2, 3, 4, 5 and 6 restricted invasive animal under the *Biosecurity Act 2014*. The Act requires that all sightings of red-eared slider turtles must be reported to Biosecurity Queensland within 24 hours of being found. By law, everyone has a general biosecurity obligation (GBO) to take all reasonable and practical measures to minimise the risk of these turtles escaping until they receive advice from an authorised officer. It must not be kept, moved, fed, given away, sold, or released into the environment.



At a local level, each local government must have a biosecurity plan that covers invasive animals in its area. This plan may include actions to be taken on certain species. Some of these actions may be required under local laws. Contact your local government for more information.

## Description

Red-eared slider turtles are a fresh water turtle that can grow up to 30 cm long. It has a distinctive red stripe behind each eye, and fine yellow streaks and lines on the head, neck, legs and tail. The undersides of red-eared slider turtles are pale yellow with dark smudges or swirls.

The head can retract back into shell (unlike native turtles). Mature turtles are aggressive and bite.

The pet trade has also developed two colour morphs of red-eared slider turtles: pastel (lighter colour with varying amounts of red and yellow) and albino (bright yellow juvenile with colour fading as turtle ages).

## Confusion with native turtles

Red-eared slider turtles can be confused with native turtles especially when the red stripes fade as the turtle ages or may be indistinct if animals are living in dirty water. There are several species of native turtle with markings on the head, but none have red stripes.

Unlike native turtles, which tuck their heads in on the side, the red-eared slider turtle retracts its head straight back into the shell. This is the most reliable characteristic for distinguishing these invasive pest turtles from our native species.

## Life cycle

Sexually mature at 2–5 years of age. Females lay up to 70 eggs per year. Females can produce viable eggs for up to five years after one mating. The maximum life-span generally 20–30 years, longer in captivity.

## Methods of spread

Spread by people through illegal pet trade. Due to species' aggression, pet owners may release turtles into local creeks and waterways.

## Habitat and distribution

Native to North America the red-eared slider turtle is very adaptable to Australian waterways, with few predators.

Red-eared slider turtles can move up to 9 km from water to find suitable habitat, search for mate or lay eggs. Nests are dug well above water level, usually within 500 m of water but sometimes up to 1.6 km away.

## Control

All suspected sightings of red-eared slider turtles must be reported to Biosecurity Queensland. If possible, anyone finding suspected turtles should immediately take measures to minimise the risk of them escaping.

## Further information

Further information is available from your local government office, or by contacting Biosecurity Queensland on 13 25 23 or visit [biosecurity.qld.gov.au](http://biosecurity.qld.gov.au).



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