



# Red-eared Slider Turtle

## At a glance

**Features:** Red stripe behind each eye, yellow stripes on face and legs, and head retracts into shell

**Origin:** Southern USA and Northern Mexico

**Pathways:** Illegally smuggled into Australia and sometimes kept as pets

**At risk:** Native turtle habitat and waterbird nesting sites. Potential to carry diseases.



Red-eared slider turtle  
Photo courtesy David Mercer

## Why is it a concern?

**The red-eared slider turtle is listed in the top 100 of the IUCN Invasive Alien list. The Australian Vertebrate Pest Committee has it listed in the Extreme risk category. It impacts threatened native species by limiting food sources, taking over nesting habitat for water birds, depleting native invertebrates and aquatic plant species if left to breed to high numbers.**

Red-eared slider turtles have been exploited by the pet animal industry since the 1970s, with massive numbers being produced on turtle farms in the USA for the international pet trade. They became a popular pet because of their small juvenile size, attractive appearance, simple care requirements and reasonably low price. However, they grow rapidly into large adults requiring expensive aquarium setups, are capable of biting their owners, and carry salmonella.

Red-eared slider turtles are illegally smuggled into Australia, illegally kept as pets and illegally released into the environment. As a result, abandoned turtles now live in freshwater ecosystems, with high densities in some Sydney wetlands. They are highly adaptable and can tolerate brackish waters, stormwater drains, and urban park ponds

## How can you spot it?

### Description

- Broad red or orange stripe behind each eye
- Narrow yellow stripes mark the rest of the animal's head and legs
- Head retracts straight back into shell rather than folding to the side
- Undershell has exactly 12 'scales' with dark patches, arranged in pairs
- Males are usually smaller than females, and have long claws on their front feet
- Up to 28 cm uppershell length

### Breeding

- Female turtles can lay up to 5-6 clutches per year, with 2-23 eggs per clutch, in a cavity dug in the soil
- Hatchlings emerge 60-75 days later
- Can live for 30 years in the wild, and up to 75 years in captivity

### Behaviour

- Eats aquatic invertebrates, fish, frog eggs and tadpoles, aquatic snakes, plants and algae
- Less active during cooler months
- Can travel up to 9km over dry land in search of suitable habitat which they will colonise rapidly.

## Report it!



If you think you have found a red-eared slider turtle, take a photo (if you can) and report it at:  
[www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/biosecurity/forms/report-an-unusual-animal-sighting](http://www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/biosecurity/forms/report-an-unusual-animal-sighting)

Or call the Invasive Species Unit on 1800 680 244 or email [invasive.species@dpi.nsw.gov.au](mailto:invasive.species@dpi.nsw.gov.au)

