

Red-Eared Slider Turtle (Trachemys scripta elegans)

An unwanted pet spells trouble for native turtles.

You will often find Red-Eared Slider Turtles sunning themselves on a log or rock in freshwater ponds or lakes in southern British Columbia. They are shy, and if threatened, they scurry into the water for safety. Adult turtles are eaten by mink, otters and raccoons, so you can understand their shyness. If you think it might be fun to have one of these cute turtles as a pet, consider looking after it for the next 20 years—that's how long they can live. They also grow to the size of a dinner plate, so you'll need a large aquarium and filter.

Impact on Communities and Native Species

Pet Red-Eared Slider Turtles often exist in unsanitary conditions and sometimes carry diseases from being kept in tanks with tropical turtles at pet stores or their distributors. If these pets are released into the wild, they can spread diseases to native turtles. Sliders also compete with native turtles for food, nesting sites and the logs where they bask in the sun to soak up heat.

Invasion History

Sliders were widely available in American flea markets and dime stores in the early 1900s. Turtle farming began in earnest in the US in the 1950s. Many of the turtles ended up as food in Asia, but thousands ended up in pet stores. Red-Eared Slider Turtles were available for sale in British Columbia as early as the 1960s, and they are still sold today. Until recently, all of BC's wild Red-Eared Slider Turtles began life as pets that were released when they outlived their owners' interest. In the last few years, however, the species has been discovered successfully breeding on the Lower Mainland and southern Vancouver Island.



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Identifying Characteristics

- red-brown "ear" patch just behind the eye (may be dark brown in old turtles)
- bright yellow underside with several scattered dark spots
- yellow stripes on legs and neck
- smooth, dark shell is often has wavy lines and swirls with patches of white, yellow or red
- males have long, curved claws used to woo females during courtship
- maximum length of 28 cm