

Pond Slider (*Trachemys scripta*)

Family Emydidae

***Introduced**

Subspecies in Wisconsin: Red-eared Slider (*Trachemys scripta elegans*), Yellow-bellied Slider (*Trachemys scripta scripta*)

Updated 2025



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Description/Identification: The Pond Slider, and its subspecies introduced in Wisconsin, the Red-eared Slider (*T. scripta elegans*) and Yellow-bellied Slider (*T. s. scripta*) are medium sized to large aquatic turtles. Females are usually much larger than males, ranging from about 9.8-13.0 inches overall carapace length, while males are smaller, at about 4.7-8.6 inches total carapace length. Males also have much longer foreclaws than females, and the anus is located on the underside of the longer and thicker tail well behind the edge of the plastron, unlike females, which have a shorter tail. As with most turtles, Sliders are toothless, and instead have hardened, bony, keratinized beaks and horny plates along the maxilla and premaxillae on the inside of the mouth. Also as with most aquatic turtles, the reddish to pinkish tongue is fixed to the inside of the mouth, and does not move freely or protrude outside of the mouth.

The carapace is serrate on the rear marginal scutes, and there may be a weak dorsal vertebral keel on the carapace as well. Ground color of the carapace can vary from blackish, dark brown, olive-brown, or olive-gray, and there may be series of pale yellow radiating lines or concentric markings on each scute. This pattern may be more prominent when the turtle is wettened. The plastron is typically pale yellow to

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orange-yellow with dark chocolate brown or black blotches or ovals on or along the midplastral scutes. The bridge connecting the plastron and carapace is usually marked with bold black and yellow “rings” or “bullseyes”. This plastron pattern can be obscured in older adults. The Yellow-bellied Slider usually has a more solidly uniform yellowish plastron with few to no dark markings. The feet of Sliders are strongly webbed.

The dorsal coloration of the skin on the head, neck, limbs, and tail ranges from a dark green, olive-gray, or blackish. A pale cream to yellow stripe extends backwards from posterior the eye, past the lower posterior of the jaw, and onto the neck on each side of the head.

Other similar colored stripes are present on the head, neck, and limbs as well. In the Red-eared Slider, a characteristic reddish stripe or streak runs from the posterior of the top of the eye, through the tympanum, to the back of the head. This red stripe can be obscured or absent in older, or melanistic Sliders. In the Yellow-bellied Slider, this red stripe is replaced instead by a thicker, vertical yellow to orange-yellow stripe from behind the eye to the bottom of the jaw. Yellow-bellied Sliders can also have a solid yellow plastron absent of any dark markings except for a pair of dark markings on the anterior-most two scutes. Sliders are usually larger than painted turtles, and usually lack a more pronounced vertebral keel and the wider, lighter colored jaws of map turtles, both of which they can be confused for. Blanding’s turtle also lacks serrate rear marginals, and has a distinctive yellow-orange chin and throat, and Wood Turtle usually has more sculptured carapace scutes and a more yellow-orange wash on the head, neck, and limbs.



Plastron, Red-eared Slider (T. s. elegans), © J.N. Stuart

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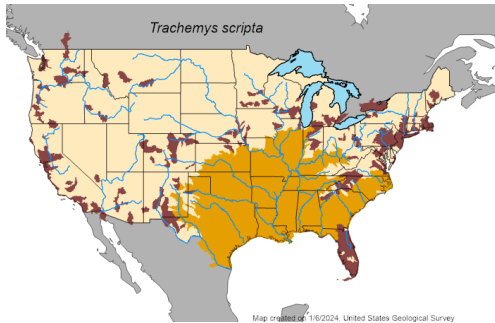
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Plastron, Yellow-bellied Slider (T. s. scripta), © Virginia Herpetological Society

Hatchling Red-eared Sliders appear similar to the adults, except they are much brighter vibrant green in overall color, with paler yellow stripes. Yellow-bellied Slider hatchlings also appear similar to adults, but are more dark olive in color.



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Range and Distribution: Sliders are a very broad and widely ranging turtle in their natural ranges. They range naturally from eastern New Mexico, Texas, Oklahoma, and Kansas, as well as into Rio Grande of Mexico, throughout the southern and south-central United States to north-central Illinois, and throughout the southeastern U.S. Widespread introductions of this turtle occur throughout the U.S., as well as worldwide. In Wisconsin, Sliders may occur as introduced individuals anywhere throughout the state.

Habitat: Sliders occur naturally in nearly any type of permanent to semi-permanent type of aquatic habitat and wetland. They especially prefer habitats with ample basking sites in the form of partially submerged rocks, logs, or shore-banks, and the habitats they may utilize can include rivers and streams, marshes, swamps, ponds and reservoirs, roadside ditches, lakes, or other types of permanent to semi-

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permanent types of waterbodies. In Wisconsin, Sliders may be found in, or utilize nearly any type of habitat wherever accidental or intentional pet releases or escapes occur, but are usually within suburban or urbanized environments.

Feeding and Diet: Sliders are omnivorous turtles, feeding on a wide variety of plant and animal material in general. These turtles may eat aquatic insects and insect larvae, mollusks such as snails, crayfish and other crustaceans, small fish, smaller amphibians and their eggs or larvae, algae, and other aquatic plants and detritus. More information is needed as to the diets of Sliders in Wisconsin, although they are probably opportunistic, and are feeding on similar foods as to their diets within their natural ranges, or to those of other native turtle species.

Natural History: More information and research are needed to further determine the natural history, and other population dynamics of Sliders as an introduced species in Wisconsin, specifically. However, they have been observed in Wisconsin as early in the year as mid to late April, and as late in the year as October or November, and there is evidence of overwintering in Wisconsin. Breeding and reproduction in Wisconsin remain questionable, although hatchlings and photographs of nesting females in Wisconsin may be evidence. One gravid female Slider with eggs was collected in Wisconsin, although this may have been an already gravid escaped or released pet. The Red-eared Slider also appears to be much more adaptable and widespread as an introduced species than the Yellow-bellied Slider, which is more of a coastal eastern U.S. subspecies.

According to some literature, such as that by Spear, et. al, this turtle could have held a native range in Wisconsin prior to a mid-Holocene contraction (Adler, 1968), (Holman, 2012), but more recent phylogenetic investigations show mixed results as to its validity, at least in Michigan populations (Terry, 2015). Most records in Wisconsin appear to be comprised simply of individual pet releases, as there does not appear to be evidence of established populations in the state, although overwintering has been documented in Olmsted and Waseca Counties, MN. Milwaukee area specimens could, at least in part, be natural range expansions northward through the Des-Plaines River system of Illinois and

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southeastern Wisconsin. The status of Sliders in Wisconsin, and whether they can be considered a part of Wisconsin's native herpetofauna remains in question, although the general consensus is that they are non-native.

Sliders are so named for their habit of quickly "sliding" or diving into the water when they are threatened or disturbed. They may claw and scratch, or attempt to hiss and bite, or withdraw into their shells if handled or captured. More recently released or escaped pets still accustomed to being around people may be less wary, and/or may still swim up to people begging for food, but can become more wary over time if they are repeatedly disturbed, or if repeated attempts are made to capture them.

It is unclear as to the extent of the negative impacts introduced Sliders have in Wisconsin, or whether it is negligible, although they probably still compete with native turtles for food, basking locations, nesting sites, or other resources to at least some extent, and may spread non-native wildlife diseases or pathogens into the environment. In some areas of the world, Sliders have been known to hybridize with other native turtle species, but this has yet to be documented in Wisconsin. Red-eared Sliders are somewhat of a poster-child species for educational campaigns promoting responsible pet ownership and in never releasing unwanted, non-native pets or other animals into the environment. Trapping them by utilizing aquatic turtle traps baiting with sardines or other fish or meats, or attempting to catch and remove by hand, whenever possible, are usually the best ways of capturing and removing non-native Sliders from the environment. Basking platform traps are a newer type of trap which may also be utilized.

Pond Slider eggs and hatchlings are most susceptible to a large number of different predators. Many different species of birds, including large wading birds, large fish, snakes, sometimes other turtles, large amphibians such as North American Bullfrogs, large predatory or carnivorous aquatic invertebrates such as waterbugs, and a wide array of carnivorous mammals such as raccoons, opossums, skunks weasels, skunks, foxes, and coyotes and otters will all readily eat hatchling turtles or turtle eggs. Adult Sliders have relatively fewer predators, but can still be eaten by some carnivorous mammals on occasion.

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Conservation Status: Sliders do not have any conservation or other status in Wisconsin at this time, as they are generally considered non-native. Sliders are also currently unregulated under N.R. 40, the State of Wisconsin's Invasive and Introduced Species Rule. Pond Sliders are currently not protected or regulated federally. The IUCN Red-List status for Pond Sliders depends on the subspecies; Yellow-bellied Sliders (*T. s. scripta*) are currently IUCN Red-List Least Concern (LC), and Red-eared Sliders (*T. s. elegans*) are not presently assessed or evaluated under IUCN Red-List status.