



# CARE OF SLIDERS AND COOTERS

*Our Turtle & Tortoise Care Sheets are meant as a general guideline to caring for your Turtle/Tortoise. Every specific species requires its own unique care - while many species are overlapping and can be kept with other species that have similar needs.*

*For even more details about the needs of a specific species - or for ideas about which different species will go well together (many do), please contact us by phone or email. Thank you!*

## **DISTRIBUTION**

Red-eared Sliders are found from Virginia to Florida and west to Kansas, Oklahoma, Texas, and New Mexico. They have also been introduced into habitats throughout the world. Fourteen *Trachemys* subspecies and species are found throughout Central and South America.

*Pseudemys* species are found from Virginia west to Illinois, Missouri, Kansas, Oklahoma, Texas, and New Mexico and as far south as Mexico.

## **SIZE**

Female Sliders can grow up to 20-30 inches. Males are considerably smaller. Many of the Cooters stay a bit smaller with females in the 14-16 inches range and males only up to 10 inches.

## **ENVIRONMENT & ENCLOSURE**

Hatchling Sliders thrive in the proper environment with good water quality, UVB and heat, and a varied diet. The ideal setup is in a 20-gallon long aquarium with 1-2 inches of substrate (sandblasting sand, very small aquarium gravel, etc.) and clean, dechlorinated water. A submersible heater should be added to keep the water in the 78-80 F range. A sturdy basking area should be added. This can be a piece of driftwood, cork bark, rock, or commercially available basking area. All Sliders need to be able to climb out onto a surface and dry off, heat up, and receive some UVB radiation. A small outside filter should be added. These can be found on-line or at your local pet store in the tropical fish section. Simply add the filter and make sure it is running properly before adding the turtles.

We like to add a few live fish to the environment. These will be chased by baby turtles but rarely eaten as the turtles will enjoy pelleted food and small worms and crickets more than live fish. Babies relish invertebrates such as blackworms, small redworms, and even crickets. They grow quickly and can reach breeding size in 3-4 years.



Contrary to what many people buying their first turtle are told, Red-eared Sliders do grow quite large. Many will grow to the size of a dinner plate or larger. They are not "stunted" by the size of their enclosure! When they grow large, most Sliders will do very well in outdoor ponds. They can thrive outside in warmer climates and are active year-round. Red-eared Sliders will hibernate in more severe environments and can tolerate cold winter conditions, often hibernating under the ice. Yellow-bellies and Red-bellies are from warmer areas of the country and they will need to be brought indoors during the winter. We suggest setting up a stock tank in a garage or utility room or sun porch so they can live well until the spring warmth.

Please make certain that your pet turtle cannot escape and enter a nearby habitat. The introduction of non-native species can lead to the introduction of diseases and can lead to hybridization of introduced and native species. In addition, many turtles raised in captivity and released into wild situations are confused, unable to cope with extreme weather changes, and many surely fall prey quite quickly to the wary predators they may encounter.

## **DIET**

Young Sliders are carnivores, eagerly consuming insects, insect larvae, and a variety of other invertebrates. As they grow, they begin feeding on a variety of plant matter in addition to the live prey. As they reach adulthood, most Sliders will continue to feed on animal matter in the form of fish, worms, and insects. In captivity, most Sliders will eagerly eat commercial turtle food and will eat large amounts of the aquatic plants found in their enclosures. Respect their need for a varied diet as young Sliders are prone to shell defects and abnormal growth due to insufficient diets.

Note: Adults of most species of Sliders will eagerly consume hatchlings if a nest hatches within the adults' enclosure. Care must be taken to remove the eggs for incubation or to protect the nest with a wire cage if it is to be incubated on-site.

## **COMMUNITY**

Red-eared Sliders, Yellow-bellied Sliders, Red-bellied Turtles, Rio Grande Cooters, and similar basking species



## RECOMMENDED READING

- Ernst, C.H., J. Lovich, and R. W. Barbour. 1994. Turtles of the United States and Canada. Smithsonian Institution Press.
- Gibbons, J. W. 1990. Life History and Ecology of The Slider Turtle. Smithsonian Institution Press.
- Gurley, R. 2003. Keeping and Breeding Freshwater Turtles. Living Art publishing. Ada, Oklahoma.
- Gurley, R. 2005. Turtles in Captivity. ECO Herpetological Publishing and Distribution. Lansing, Michigan.
- Pritchard, P. 1979. Encyclopedia of Turtles. TFH, Inc. Neptune, New Jersey.
- Vosjoli, P. de 1992. The General Care and Maintenance of Red-eared Sliders and Other Popular Freshwater Turtles. Advanced Vivarium Systems, California.