

Yellow-Bellied Slider

Trachemys scripta scripta



Photo courtesy of John White, CalPhotos.

The yellow-bellied slider is a large, semi-aquatic, basking turtle that can be found resting on logs, stumps, or rocks when the weather is mild and the sun is out. It can live for more than 25 years, with no signs of old age. This species can mate with the red-eared slider (*Trachemys scripta elegans*), producing hybrids that are often sold as pets.

Species Description

The yellow-bellied slider has a prominent patch of yellow on the side of the head, which is most evident in juveniles and females. Narrow, yellow stripes mark the neck, legs, and arms. The upper shell (called the carapace) is oval in shape, has slight serrations around the edges, and has olive to brownish-yellow vertical bands; although older turtles can be completely black. The lower shell (called the plastron) is typically yellow with dark smudge-like markings. Two solid black spots can often be seen on the rear underside of the shell. Males range from 13-20 cm (5-8 in) in length and females range from 20-33 cm (8-13 in).

Native & Introduced Ranges

While this turtle is considered native to the United States in parts of Virginia and the Carolinas, it has expanded to areas outside of its native range. Populations have been established in locations in Arizona, California, Pennsylvania, and Florida, and individual turtles have been collected in New York, New Mexico, and Virginia, although it is unknown if there are any established populations in these locations. In Pennsylvania, the yellow-bellied slider has been reported in the Lake Erie, Ohio, Susquehanna, and Delaware River watersheds.



Biology & Spread

Because the yellow-bellied slider is popular in the pet industry, intentional pet releases, as well as escapes into the natural environment are the most likely vectors for its spread. Because of their longevity and large size, unprepared pet owners may release them into local waterways and impoundments, which has led to their introduction and spread into the natural environment. Besides doing harm to the ecosystem, this practice is illegal in Pennsylvania.

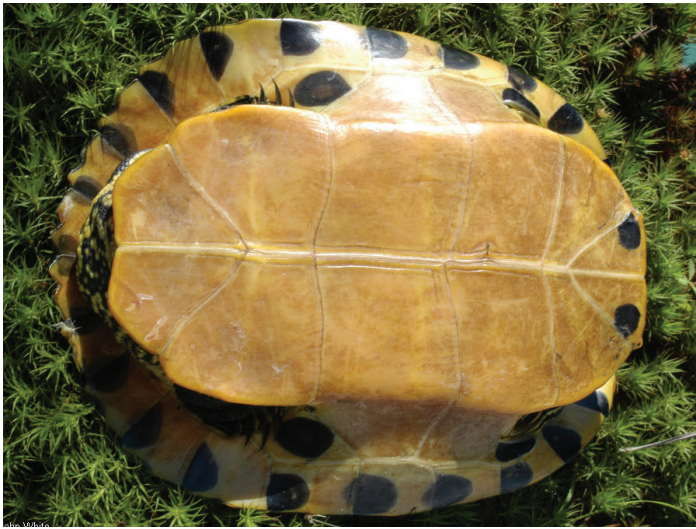


Photo courtesy of John White, CalPhotos.

Habitat

The yellow-bellied slider inhabits a wide variety of habitats including lakes, ponds, streams, rivers, ditches, marshes, bays, and swamps, and areas with aquatic vegetation. It is a semi-aquatic turtle, so while it typically remains in the water, it will move on land to lay its eggs in a terrestrial nest. It will also move on land to and from hibernation sites or alternative feeding areas.

Impacts

Little is known about the ecological impact of the yellow-bellied slider; however, their omnivorous diet of plants, seeds, insects, crustaceans, tadpoles, and fish and their basking behavior puts them in direct competition with other native species of turtles for food and basking sites. These turtles have also been linked with salmonella when farmed and sold as pets, increasing the spread of disease to humans and other turtles.

Photo courtesy of John White, CalPhotos.



Prevention & Control

Yellow-bellied sliders are a popular pet and readily available for purchase through the aquarium trade. The best way to control the introduction and spread of this turtle is to prevent their introduction in the first place, because once established, aquatic invaders are expensive to control and almost impossible to eliminate.

Pet owners can play an important role in helping to protect lakes, ponds, rivers, and streams from the harmful effects of invasive species by following a few simple steps. Always confirm that a species is allowed under state and federal regulations. If a pet is no longer wanted, be sure to never release any non-native reptiles or amphibians into the natural environment; instead, consider one of the following alternatives:

- Contact your local pet store for advice on proper handling and return.
- Give/trade with another pet owner.
- Donate to a local aquarium society, school, zoo or aquatic business.
- Contact your local veterinarian or pet retailer for guidance about humane disposal of animals.



Photo courtesy of John White, CalPhotos.

References:

Louis A. Somma, Ann Foster, and Pam Fuller, 2019. *Trachemys scripta scripta* (Thunberg in Schoepff, 1792): U.S. Geological Survey, Nonindigenous Aquatic Species Database, Gainesville, FL,

Savannah River Ecology Laboratory Outreach and SPARC. Yellow-Bellied Slider Turtle Fact Sheet. University of Georgia.

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