Red Eared Slider Secrets

“Although Most Red-Eared Sliders Can Live Up to 45-60 Years, Most WILL NOT Survive Two Years!”

Chris Johnson
By Chris Johnson

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- CHRIS JOHNSON -
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ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

To my family, whose support and sacrifices have been critically important to me.

To my red eared sliders, the little pets that have inspire me on writing this book.

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# Table of Contents

Chapter One: Introduction ....................................................... 8

Chapter Two: What is a Turtle? .................................................. 9
   The Biology of a Turtle ....................................................... 10
   Anatomy ................................................................. 10
   Taxonomy of the Red Eared Slider ...................................... 14
   Life span of a Turtle in the Wild and in Captivity ................... 15
   The Native Habitat of the Red-Eared Slider ......................... 16

Chapter Three: Is The Turtle The Right Pet For You? ................... 17
   Understanding the Requirements of Turtle Ownership .............. 18
   An Overview of Other Turtle Species .................................. 24
   The Best and Worst Species of Turtles and Tortoises for Beginners 27

Chapter Four: Selecting The Right Turtle .................................. 31
   Where to Get a Red-Eared Slider ....................................... 33
   How to Choose a Healthy Turtle ........................................ 35
   Quarantine ............................................................ 38
   Changing Your Mind .................................................... 39
   A Shopping List .......................................................... 41
Chapter Five: Creating a Healthy Environment for a Red Eared Slider ---42

The Enclosure ---------------------------------------------------------------42

Lighting ---------------------------------------------------------------48

Heat -----------------------------------------------50

Basking -----------------------------------------------51

Substrate -----------------------------------------------53

Furnishings -----------------------------------------------54

Chapter Six: Feeding Your Turtle -----------------------------------------------59

Water Requirements -----------------------------------------------59

Vegetable Food Sources -----------------------------------------------61

Live-Based Food -----------------------------------------------62

Supplements -----------------------------------------------64

Chapter Seven: Red-Eared Slider Reproduction -----------------------------------------------65

Breeding Your Red-Eared Sliders -----------------------------------------------66

Caring for the Young -----------------------------------------------68
Chapter Eight: Common Health Problems & Symptoms to Watch Out ---70

Finding a Good Veterinarian ------------------------------------------70
Wounds ---------------------------------------------------------------72
Respiratory Infections -----------------------------------------------73
Intestinal Infections -----------------------------------------------74
Parasites ---------------------------------------------------------74
Cloacal Prolapse -----------------------------------------------75
Visceral Gout -----------------------------------------------------76
Skin and Shell Problems ------------------------------------------77
Beaks and Claws -------------------------------------------------79
The Importance of Calcium ----------------------------------------79
Zoonoses --------------------------------------------------------80
Advice to Prevent Health Problems -----------------------------81

Chapter Nine: Turtle Behavior ---------------------------------------82

Handling and Holding ------------------------------------------82
Transporting Turtles ------------------------------------------84
Intelligence and Temperament of Red-Eared Sliders -------------------88
Hibernation ----------------------------------------------------90
Chapter 1: Introduction

One of the oldest creatures still living on the earth, the turtle has existed for millions of years, and it is one of the most easily-recognized animals today with its hard, protective shell. They, along with many other varieties of reptiles, are gaining popularity as household pets and for good reason. For anyone who suffers from allergies to pet dander, turtles are a great choice, due to their lack of fur. Far from being simplistic and stupid creatures, turtles are interesting to watch and have distinct personalities of their own.

Although turtles do require less attention and time than a larger pet, like a dog or a cat, it would be a mistake to assume that they don’t have their own special needs and requirements. Turtles have different requirements than mammals to be happy and healthy, and this book in particular will focus on red-eared sliders.

If you’re a beginner to the world of turtle care, then this book will get you started off on the right foot. You’ll find information about housing, feeding, reproduction and common health problems to help you ensure that you and your red-eared slider will have a long and happy relationship. Even if you’re an expert, you may still find new ideas in this book that can help you out.

Although you can read this book from cover to cover, feel free to use it as a reference whenever you need to brush up your knowledge on a particular subject.
Chapter 2: What is a Turtle?

Although turtles are one of the most easily recognized animals on earth, there are still many misconceptions and misinformation about them. This chapter will explain more about the biology of a turtle, its anatomy and physiology, to help you better understand its uniqueness. Better understanding of a turtle will, in the long run, help you to take better care of your new pet and more easily identify when things go wrong.

When most people think of turtles, often, images of tiny chelonians sold in pet shops come to mind. These little guys are only one of many different types of turtles and tortoises, many of which can become excellent pets. When using the word turtle, however, this should be applied to animals that live in or around the water. Red-eared sliders belong to this group, being semi-aquatic, because although they love to walk around on the land, they will also spend a lot of their time around the water, especially for feeding and mating.

Tortoise refers to those chelonians that live on land and rarely go into the water, using it only for drinking and bathing. Their shells often have a higher dome to help protect them from predators, and they can even be found in desert environments.
The Biology of a Turtle

Turtles are reptiles, and like all reptiles and amphibians, they are ectothermic. This means that they cannot produce their own body heat like mammals can, so they have to rely on a warm environment to metabolize their food and survive. While a human being can maintain a body temperature of around 98.6 degrees Fahrenheit, whether the temperature outside is 100 or 50 degrees, the body temperature of a turtle will match its environment.

To keep their metabolism high enough to properly digest their food and maintain muscle function, turtles will often bask on rocks and absorb the heat of the sun, raising their body temperatures. This need for heat is perhaps the greatest factor in influencing their lives. In hotter climates, such as can be found in Latin America and Africa, there are a diverse number of species of turtles and tortoises. In cooler climes, such as in North America and Europe, it’s more difficult for turtles to get enough heat, and so the turtles are often smaller in size and darker in coloration. Darker colors allow for more heat absorption from sunlight.

Should the temperatures drop low enough, turtles will bury themselves deep in the mud below the frost line, and they will hibernate until spring. Their metabolism slows down, nearly stopping all body functions, until warmer temperatures and longer days bring them back out.

The Anatomy of a Turtle

Red-eared sliders, like every other turtle, are easily distinguished by the hard shells on their backs. The shell varies in coloration and flexibility, depending on the species, from being leathery and tough on a Softshell turtle to thick and durable like a box turtle. Red-eared sliders are also easily identified by their
dark green coloration, accented with striations of yellow that helps them to blend in with their surroundings. Their name comes from the tell-tale red stripes at the sides of their heads, right where their ears are.

The bones of a turtle are thick and heavy, including their skulls, which lack holes between the individual bones that can be found in all other species of reptiles. They are lacking fossae, which are holes in the skull that help to support jaw muscles. Because they do lack fossae, their jaw muscles run along the outsides of the skull, expanding outwards when turtles close their mouths.

Turtles are also lacking teeth. Instead, they have a sharp-edged, horny beak made of keratin, and they eat by tearing off hunks of food with this beak and their claws. Their throats are flexible to allow for swallowing large bites, but because they can’t produce saliva, a red-eared slider has to take its food into the water to swallow it.

These animals have excellent eyesight and can detect movement from a considerable distance, able to spot the outlines of predators, even if they’re standing still. Eyesight plays a vital role in finding food, along with smell, and according to most scientists, they’re able to see in color and are especially receptive to red and yellow colors. Studies suggest they’re sensitive to infrared colors outside of the range of human eyesight.

Like lizards and snakes, a red-eared slider turtle has a structure in the roof of its mouth called the Jacobson’s organ, which enhances its sense of smell, even while under water. Although a turtle can’t extend its tongue the way a snake can, they can still capture particles in the air or water and draw them across the organ, which sends signals to the brain through the olfactory nerve. Because the tongue is thick and immovable, it can’t help with swallowing, which provides an additional reason why a red-eared slider has to go into the
water to eat. The force of the water rushing down its throat also pushes down the food.

Breathing normally involves chest expansion, but in the red-eared slider, this is hampered by the rigid shell. Because of this, turtles have a special set of muscles that move internal organs in order to expand and contract the size of their chest cavities. This is why people often hear a hiss when a turtle is picked up. It isn’t a sound of aggression, but rather it’s the sound of air being forced out of the body so that the turtle has room to pull its head back into its shell for defense.

Turtles also rely on two other methods of breathing. The first is called gular pumping, where the throat expands to take in air which is then pushed down into the lungs. A large, moveable bone in the throat called the hyoid bone allows for this. In addition, turtles can also rely on the linings of their throat and cloaca to absorb oxygen from the air. During hibernation, turtles have to rely entirely upon gular pumping and cloacal breathing to get all of the oxygen they need beneath the ground.

While mammals, including humans, have a four-chambered heart, all turtles and reptiles have a three-chambered heart. Because of this, some mixing of oxygen-rich and oxygen-poor blood takes place in the ventricle, the single, bottom chamber of the heart, before it is returned to one of the two atria, which are the top chambers. This has been proven to be far less efficient than the circulatory system of a mammal, and the result is that a turtle cannot sustain strenuous activity for long. They tire easily, and they require periods of rest.

The cloaca, as mentioned before in cloacal breathing, is a single opening beneath the base of the tail. It is the chamber of the body into which the digestive, urinary and reproductive tracts empty. Red-eared sliders release their excretions in water-soluble urea, like many mammals. Their
feces vary in color depending on their diet, ranging from anywhere from green to brown, and they dissolve very quickly in water. The cloaca is closer to the body on a female turtle, and on a male who has a thicker and longer tail, it’s located a little further away from the base.

When it comes to the shell, there are two main sections. The top part is called the carapace, and the bottom is called the plastron. The carapace is further divided into sections called the scutes (osteoderms), which are made from the protein keratin, the same substance that makes up human fingernails and hair. These scutes are made up of living tissue and contain nerve endings, so a turtle can actually feel it when someone is touching its shell. When a red-eared slider sheds its skin, the top layers of the scutes will also fall off. The bridge of the shell is a section of bone in between the fore and hind limbs, and it connects the carapace with the plastron.

When it comes to the differences between males and females, there are a few subtle, visual cues to look out for. Female red-eared sliders are generally larger in sheer size, and they have smaller tails. Males, meanwhile, are smaller in size, have longer front claws, and the cloaca is located closer to the tip of the tail. Older males tend to have slightly longer snouts as well, and the plastron also often appears concave to allow for some stability during mating. In general, however, it’s almost impossible to determine the gender of a juvenile red-eared slider by sight alone. You have to wait for sexual maturity to see the distinguishing characteristics, and although a turtle can mature early if overfed, a red-eared slider will reach the appropriate size in around 2 to 4 years for males and 3 to 5 years for females. Another way to determine maturity is by size. Males need to measure at least 4 inches, and females need to measure about 5 inches.
The Taxonomy of the Red-Eared Slider

Scientists use a binomial naming system (binomial literally means “two name”) to classify all the different types of plants and animals. The system begins with the very broad classification called the kingdom and it runs all the way down to the species, which helps scientists to better understand the connection between all of the animals and plant life on earth.

The taxonomy of the red-eared slider:

**Kingdom:** Animalia – the animal kingdom

**Phylum:** Chordata – animals that have a bilateral body plan

**Class:** Reptilia – reptiles, which include snakes, turtles, and other lizards

**Order:** Testudines – the groups of animals with hard shells, like turtles, tortoises and terrapins

**Family:** Emydidae – a family of turtles that come from ponds and marshes

**Genus:** Trachemys – these are all of the groups of turtles known as sliders

**Species:** Trachemys scripta – this species of turtle are known as pond sliders

**Subspecies:** T. scripta elegans – the red-eared slider

When referring to the red-eared slider, the binomial term is Trachemys scripta elegans.

The name red-eared slider itself comes from the very distinctive red markings on the side of the turtle’s head as well as its ability to very quickly slide off of rocks or logs and enter the water. This species has undergone a renaming. It was previously known as Trachemys scripta troostii to honour an American herpetologist, but this is now the name of the Cumberland Slider.
How Long Do Red-Eared Sliders Live in Captivity?

When given the best of care and attention from you, a red-eared slider can live for a very long time in captivity. Out in the wild, they don’t have the benefit of veterinary care, high-quality food and safety from predators. In captivity, a red-eared slider can live for up to fifty years, while out in the wild, they can live for up to twenty. This is more than double the life expectancy!

This should also help you to realize that taking care of a turtle can literally be a life-long commitment, unlike taking care of a gerbil or a hamster whose life expectancies do not much exceed three to five years.
The Native Habitat of the Red-Eared Slider

Originally, the red-eared slider came from the south-eastern United States, where it flourished in warm temperatures, and it has spread out so that it is now found throughout much of North America. It is a semi-aquatic turtle, meaning that while it is a strong swimmer and feeds in water, it also comes up onto the land in order to bask in the sun, lay eggs and walk around. The red-eared slider can be found near bodies of water, especially ponds, wetlands, rivers and lakes.

Although they originated and thrive in the wetlands of the United States, they’ve spread across dryer regions, proving that it’s tolerant of a diverse range of climates. They can be found in the more arid regions such as New Mexico and Texas, and they spread as far north as Iowa and Illinois.

When the temperatures drop below 50 degrees Fahrenheit, the red-eared slider will go into a state of hibernation. Out in the wild, these resourceful creatures will hide in hollow logs and in driftwood beneath the surface of frozen water. If the habitat of the turtle never drops this low, it maintains normal behavior during the winter.
Chapter 3 – Is a Turtle the Right Pet For You?

For many people, the acquisition of their first turtle is an accident. They may have found their red-eared slider out in the woods, or perhaps passed by a tank full of them on sale at the pet shop, or acquired them when asked by a friend to take it in when aforementioned friend had to move. Whatever the reason, it’s important to know what you’re getting into before you keep the turtle. They are not like cats or dogs; their needs are far different. Anyone who thinks that they are easier to care for and demand less time, attention and money are going to be in for a big surprise. They need proper housing, food, heating or could need a veterinarian’s care. Suddenly, what seemed like an inexpensive, easy pet has turned into a significant financial investment.

You will also need to make sure that the other members of your household are willing to abide with a turtle, unless you happen to live alone. Although turtles are quiet pets that won’t run and jump around the house, they require care and attention, and they can make quite a mess. There’s also a risk of salmonella being transferred from the pet to a person. Make sure that everyone is on board with your decision to get a turtle, and life will be happier for both you and your chelonian.
Understanding the Requirements of Turtle Ownership

**A Lifelong Commitment**

First and foremost, it’s important that you understand that owning a turtle can be a life-long commitment. In captivity, red-eared sliders can live for anywhere between thirty to fifty years. If you acquire your turtle later in life, that means he could very well outlive you! Ask yourself if you are prepared to look after this turtle throughout his entire life, because this is a living, breathing creature and not a disposable toy. You should be prepared to accept the responsibility of caring for him for as long as you possibly can and ideally for the rest of his natural life.

You should make plans for what will be done with your pets should you no longer be able to care for them or pass away. Many turtles end up being passed from parent to child and from child to grandchild. Don’t count on a pet shop or a zoo being willing to take in your turtle. Most stores want young stock, and many zoos will refuse to take in pet turtles or tortoises. Zoos concentrating on breeding animals that are threatened or nearing extinction want animals that have a known, recorded pedigree. Taking in an unknown brings a risk of parasite and disease to the zoo population, which they won’t accept.

**The Financial Side of Things**

Secondly, you will need to go to the time and trouble of managing your expenses. Red-eared sliders, fortunately, are very affordable pets, costing anywhere from ten to thirty dollars. However, they are semi-aquatic, and they spend most of their time in the water, where they have to eat. You’ll need an aquarium, and at minimum, twenty gallons for a single, small turtle. Then you’ll need a strong filtration system, furnishings, lights, a water heater, and a sturdy cover. This set-up could cost you anywhere from one hundred to two hundred dollars, possibly even more, especially if you opt for setting up an outdoor pond and enclosure with gardening and landscaping.

Daily maintenance and feeding will cost you money as well. While they’re young, red-eared sliders eat a mainly carnivorous diet, turning more and more to plant-based foods as they mature. You’ll need to be able to afford all of
these different foods, plus they’ll need vitamin and mineral supplements added to their diets to avoid potentially fatal disorders.

Most of these costs are up front and can easily be accounted for when looking over a receipt, but what most people forget is that their utility bills will increase when taking in a turtle. Heat lamps take a lot of electricity to run, and for a turtle like a red-eared slider, you’ll have to pay for the electricity to run the filtration pumps, the water heaters and the lights. If you’re planning on acquiring a lot of turtles at once, you may see a dramatic increase in your monthly bill.

It’s also going to be wise of you to budget for the occasional trip to the veterinarian. Red-eared sliders are, in general, one of the hardiest varieties of turtles that you can get, but there’s always a chance that they can get sick, and visits to the vet don’t come cheap. There’s also a risk of trauma, because accidents do happen, so be sure to account for the occasional visit, just in case. You’ll have to make sure to find a vet who specializes in reptiles. A veterinarian who practices mainly on dogs and cats may not be willing to see your turtle or may not be able to properly treat the animal in the case of an emergency.

**Make Sure Everyone Wants a Turtle**

Unless you live alone and answer to no one, it’s important to make sure that everyone in the household will accept living with a turtle. Because of the time and money involved in taking care of a pet, spouses should consult with each other and make sure they’re in agreement. Depending on the arrangement of the marriage, a spouse will most likely have to help take responsibility for providing for the turtle’s needs. In addition, should you fall sick or have to leave town for awhile, someone else will have to take care of the turtle. Most often, that burden falls to the spouse or another family member or roommate. Be sure that this person is willing to put in his or her own time and effort.
When you go to speak with your spouse or significant other, be sure to share all of your plans as well as what you know about caring for the animal, how much it will cost and what kind of care it will need. You should also make plans as to where you’ll keep the animal and discuss how it will affect your lives. Being prepared and getting the acceptance of the family will be far better than trying to sneak in the turtle later and hoping no one will notice.

**Living with Other Pets**

It’s likely that someone who likes turtles is also going to like having other sorts of animals in the house. If you’re one of those sorts of people, then you’ll need to be careful if you intend to bring in a turtle to live around your cat, dog, lizards or birds.

Many different types of animals are natural predators, like dogs, cats and ferrets. Although a cat doesn't pose much threat to a larger tortoise, they can and do torture and kill smaller turtles and hatchlings. Ferrets have sharp teeth and can be quite tenacious.

Dogs, however, pose a greater danger. A medium-sized dog can not only kill or maim smaller turtles, they can also severely injure larger ones. Because they can be so destructive, there are many rescue organizations that won’t adopt out their rescue turtles to families that own a dog at all. While there are a great many risks here, it’s also possible for a dog and a turtle to live together peacefully. It will require you to make sure your turtles remain safe and to train your dog, however.

Don’t ever assume that just because your dog is friendly around people that he will be friendly with your turtle too. To most dogs, especially those that are left home alone during the day when everyone is out at school or working, a turtle can be just another toy. The dog may not be acting out of malice, but simply doesn’t understand that chewing on a turtle’s shell or legs will actually harm the animal. If you allow your dog around your turtle, even if the dog is well-trained, don’t allow them to remain together unsupervised.
Fortunately, red-eared sliders are semi-aquatic turtles who can live comfortably in an aquarium. By virtue of living in a sturdy, water-tight enclosure like an aquarium, they are already pretty safe. Cats may pat at the glass, but that’s as far as most will try to go to get to the turtle inside. Just make sure the enclosure is secure enough that a dog can’t tip it over, if you own a dog. Other turtles living in the house will be safe enough from each other with the same system, being kept to their own, secure enclosures.

**Turtles and Children**

Because of the Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtle craze, a lot of children wanted turtles as pets. Many, many of them were disappointed when they were faced with the reality of turtle-keeping. Turtles don’t do martial arts, they don’t like to live in sewers, and they don’t even like to eat pizza. When the children got tired of keeping their pets, many were released into the wild or died from neglect. In fact, in the early 1990s, about 300,000 to one million red-eared sliders were exported to France to meet the demands for turtles. When children got tired of keeping them, they were released into the local waterways, and today they are thriving.

There are some statisticians who say that over 90 percent of all turtles in captivity will die within their first year, having suffered from malnourishment or mistreatment. This is a terrible reality, given how easy to keep and how hardy many breeds of turtles are.
For this reason, and for others, turtles are not a good choice of pet for a child. Not only are children apt to grow bored with taking care of a turtle, but the turtle can pose some risks for a child. Turtles have been known to bite fingers, not out of aggressiveness, but simply because a finger looks like a tasty treat. These bites can hurt, and getting the finger extracted can be a tricky process. Trying to wrestle with the turtle to get it back may only frighten the turtle, causing it to pull back its head and take your finger with it. Instead, hold still, and eventually the turtle will let go, realizing that your hand isn’t dinner.

**Turtles Are Not Fluffy**

For many people, owning a pet means owning something that is fluffy and cuddly, something that can provide companionship with a lot of playing or touching. If you’re one of these sorts of people, you need to be aware that many turtles and tortoises do not like to be touched at all. This isn’t uncommon among other lizards and reptiles either. In the wild, contact with another animal usually means a threat to its life. A turtle might hiss as he expels the air from his lungs, readying to pull his head back into his shell, if you should try to reach for it, or they might try to defend themselves against the perceived threat that you pose to it.

In captivity, individual turtles may grow used to being touched and handled, however, it’s always best to keep contact to a minimum, such as when moving them from one enclosure to another or readying them for transport to a vet. Too much contact with your turtle can stress out the animal to the point where it actually begins to grow ill. It may refuse to eat, withdraw into its shell for long periods, or even die.

When it comes to red-eared sliders, great care should be taken with them. They might be slippery from having spent their time in the water, and they have strong legs and sharp claws. They may hiss and empty their bowels.

If you plan on letting anyone else handle your turtle for you, be sure to instruct them on how to do it properly. Because of the risk of salmonella being transferred, it’s not a good idea to let children or people with weakened immune systems to handle them at all. In addition, you should always, always wash your hands before and after handling, to not only reduce the risk of
transferring toxins on your skin to the turtle but also to minimize the risk of catching salmonella poisoning from it.

**Housetraining is Not Necessary**

With most animals that come into the house as pets, some amount of training is a matter of course. Dogs and cats both learn to eliminate only in certain places, be it outside or in a litter box. Some varieties of birds can learn tricks or mimic speech. Many animals can at least learn to respond to your voice or the sounds of their names.

Turtles, on the other hand, never master the concepts of housebreaking or training. They will eliminate wherever they want whenever it’s time for them to do so, including all over your hands. They don’t respond to leashes, they won’t answer when their names are called, and they simply don’t have the cerebral hemispheres of the brains that mammals have. In short, they don’t have the intellectual capacity to understand such things.

That’s not to say that they’re completely stupid, however. Turtles and tortoises may not be the most intelligent pets, but they are highly capable when it comes to matters that are important to them. They are able to recognize their own food bowls and have complex behaviors of their own.
An Overview of Other Turtle Species

Throughout the world, there are over two hundred and fifty different species of turtles and tortoises. Some are plain and blend in well with their surroundings, and some are very brightly colored. Some make great pets, and others don’t. Although this book focuses mainly on the red-eared slider, which is a great choice of pet turtle for a beginner or a chelonian expert, it’s beneficial to educate yourself about other turtle species. Becoming complacent is one of the biggest mistakes that many people make.

Aquatic and Semi-Aquatic Turtles

These turtles come in all shapes and sizes and eat all sorts of things, but the one thing they all have in common is that they constantly need to be near or in the water. Red-eared sliders are semi-aquatic, meaning that they spend most of their time in the water, but they come up onto land in order to bask and lay their eggs.

- **Painted Turtle (Chrysemys picta)**
  These dark green to black turtles have yellow or red markings, growing up to 10 inches in length. The head has yellow stripes, and they can be found in North America from coast to coast. They live in shallow ponds, swamps and streams, and they’re omnivorous. Painted turtles thrive better in outdoor ponds than indoors.

- **Common Map Turtle (Graptemys geographica)**
  Named for the pattern of lines on their skin and carapace, this turtle has strong, wide jaws adapted to crushing mollusks. The males are
significantly smaller than females, and they can be found in North America, from the Great Lakes south to Alabama. These turtles are carnivorous and need a large aquarium or outdoor pond.

- **Eastern Mud Turtle (Kinosternon subrubrum)**
  These turtles are small with a smooth, oval carapace, and their colors range from yellowish brown to black. The plastron has two hinges that close to protect the turtle, and their skin is usually brown with yellow spots. They live in North America, ranging from New England to Texas. Avoid a strong current in the aquarium set-up with these turtles and feed them an omnivorous diet.

- **European Pond Terrapin (Emys orbicularis)**
  This pond terrapin is a turtle that is personable and recognizes its feeder. It’s a medium-sized turtle that reaches about 8 inches, and the carapace is dark green to brown or black with small dots. The males have red-tinged eyes while females have yellow-tinged eyes, and this species is protected in many areas due to their dwindling numbers. Pollution is a great threat to these river turtles.

- **Smooth Softshell Turtle (Trionyx muticus)**
  Rather than having a hard shell, this softshell turtle’s carapace is smooth and leathery, colored tan to dark brown or olive with small spots towards the tail. They have narrow, pointed noses and have ferocious tempers. These turtles will bite, and for that reason, they should be kept only by experienced owners, housed alone and kept away from children.

**Terrestrial and Semi-Terrestrial Turtles**

Unlike aquatic and semi-aquatic turtles who spend most of their time in the water, coming out to bask or lay their eggs, these turtles spend most of their time on land. Occasionally they still go into the water, whether it be for a drink, a bath or to escape predators. Some species will sometimes go into the water to breed, but one species can’t swim at all.
Wood Turtle (*Chlemmys insculpta*)
This turtle has a brown, rough carapace that looks rather a lot like carved wood, from which it gets its name. It’s protected in almost all of their native states, so never pick up one from the wild. Always buy captive-bred turtles. It can be found in eastern Canada to northern Virginia and west to Michigan and northern Iowa.

Diamondback Terrapin (*Malachlemys terrapin*)
Small to medium-sized, they come with a grey, brown or black carapace, light skin, black eyes, and are considered an attractive, appealing species to keep. Captive breeding may be required to save them from extinction, but they require specialized care like brackish water instead of freshwater.

Giant Asian Pond Turtle (*Heosemys grandis*)
A rather large species of turtle, at 19 inches, they have a brown to black carapace and a yellow plastron. Originally, they come from Thailand, Burma, Malaysia, Cambodia, Vietnam and Laos, and they live near rivers, ponds and marshes.

Indochinese Box Turtle or Flowered Box Turtle (*Cuora galbinifrons*)
A small turtle with a high-domed carapace, it ranges in color from dark brown to black with splotches of lighter color. Yellow or cream stripes may be present on the shell, and the head is dark with lighter stripes. Found in southern China to Vietnam, this turtle is considerably shy, has an omnivorous diet and can be found in bushy habitats and forests at high altitudes.

Indian Black Turtle (*Melanochelys trijuga*)
Plain-colored with an elongated carapace, this turtle comes from India, Nepal, Burma, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh. Although it swims well, it spends most of its time out of the water basking, and during the dry season, it estivates under leaves until the rains come.
One of the most important questions a beginning herpetologist needs to ask him or herself is what sort of turtle he wants to keep. Something aquatic? Something terrestrial? There are advantages and disadvantages to each. Aquatic species of turtles don’t tolerate handling very well, and they’re better for watching rather than touching. Tortoises, on the other hand, are more responsive to their caretakers. There are also issues of expense; some breeds are more expensive to purchase and care for than others.

Although this book will cover the caring and feeding of red-eared sliders, this section will present other options for a beginning turtle-owner who may be considering other species to add to the collection.

In general, a suitable turtle for a beginner is docile and tame, easy to handle. They’re smaller to medium sized at adulthood, have a diet that’s easy to provide for and can tolerate a wide range of environments.

The worst turtles for a beginner are any that are wild-caught. Native populations are already suffering depleting numbers due to a number of factors, including pollution, poaching and loss of habitat. Baby turtles are another difficult choice for a beginner, due to their delicacy and needs for the perfect habitat and healthy diet. Even the smallest mistake can prove to have large consequences.

Please keep in mind that this section only provides a brief glimpse of these other species. Each type of turtle will require more specialized care that may differ from keeping a red-eared slider. If you find that you’re taking a greater interest in these other species, be sure to do further research about them.
The Best Species

- **Painted Turtle (Chrysemys picta)**
  While not as colorful as a red-eared slider, a Painted turtle is still attractive with its markings of red and yellow stripes on an olive background. There are four subspecies of Painted turtles, all of which require similar care. They are omnivorous, grow to about 10 inches, and are widely bred and inexpensive.

- **Florida Red-Bellied Turtle (Pseudemys nelsoni)**
  Found down in Florida and Georgia, these turtles are similar in care to red-eared sliders. The plastron is not actually red, but it is marked with splotches of red. This breed is not always readily available among reptile dealers, and they will happily share a tank with Sliders and Painted turtles. Like many aquatic turtles, they start out carnivorous in life but end up more herbivorous as they age.

- **Musk Turtle (Sternotherus odoratus)**
  At four and a half inches in length at adulthood, the Musk turtle is one of the smallest in the world. Although small, these guys are feisty and pugnacious like their cousins the Snapping turtles. When first captured, they will snap, bite and void their bowels, but they do turn out to be active and hardy pets, able to get along with some larger species of turtles. Musk turtles are one of the few species that can live entirely within an all-water aquarium without any land for rest.

- **Mud Turtle (Kinosternon subrubrum)**
  Being a close relative of the Musk turtle, they can be cared for in much the same way as them. They don’t need a basking area, and they too can live in something as simple as a bare tank of water. These turtles are carnivorous and scavengers.

- **Matamata (Chelus fimbriatus)**
  This is a rare Pleurodiran turtle that is found in the pet trade, a turtle with a long neck that pulls its head alongside its shell instead of retreating into the shell. In appearance, the Matamata looks like a large,
moss-covered tree stump with a triangular head. Almost always covered in algae, which acts as camouflage, this turtle is entirely aquatic and has a carnivorous diet. Being difficult to find and rarely bred, this turtle would make an expensive but unusual and interesting pet.

- **Asian Box Turtle (*Cuora amboinensis*)**
  Imported from Southeast Asia, these are the most water-loving of the terrestrial turtles. These turtles are almost always wild-caught, but they are becoming more readily available through captive breeding, which may be more expensive but are generally healthier and better-looking. These turtles are omnivorous, reach 8 inches in length and need both an aquatic and terrestrial area in their habitats.

- **Redfoot Tortoise (*Geochelone carbonaria*)**
  Originating from South America, this tortoise is commonly bred in captivity and easily available. It needs a humid environment, is an herbivore, and it is renown as a docile, gentle tortoise that soon learns to respond to its caretaker. Along with closely related species like the Yellowfoot tortoise, this is one of the best choices for beginning tortoise keepers.

**The Worst Species**

- **North American Box Turtles (*Terrapene carolina*)**
  Although these Box turtles make great pets and are responsive to their owners, their species has dwindled so much that the Convention on the International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES) has labeled them as a threatened species, and their trade is legally regulated. Almost all of the turtles in the pet trade are wild-caught instead of captive bred, and for that reason, they should be avoided.

- **Snapping Turtle (*Chelydra serpentina*)**
  These large, mainly inactive turtles can weigh more than forty pounds at adulthood. They are also very aggressive and have never been successfully tamed, and although the hatchlings are less aggressive, they
eventually grow into adulthood, and they are capable of inflicting nasty wounds or taking off fingers.

- **Alligator Snapping Turtle** (*Macroclemys temmincki*)
  These are the largest species found in North America and the largest freshwater species throughout the world, weighing up to two hundred and fifty pounds at adulthood. Because of this, the care of these turtles is better left to aquariums or zoos, where they can be comfortably housed and fed.

- **Softshell Turtles** (*Trionyx species*)
  These turtles are almost entirely aquatic, notable for their leathery carapaces. These are large turtles that can grow up to eighteen inches in length, preferring to live in shallow waters. Though they are not aggressive, they’re very capable of biting, and they have long, snakelike necks and powerful legs. They are also very sensitive to water conditions, and they are prone to shell infections.

- **Diamondback Terrapin** (*Malaclemmys terrapin*)
  Though they’re attractive in appearance, these turtles are unfortunately considered to be very tasty in soups, and they have since been hunted to near the point of extinction. In addition to being very difficult to obtain, they have adapted to living in saltwater conditions and don’t do well in freshwater.

- **Sulcata or Spurred Tortoise** (*Geochelone sulcata*)
  Native to the arid grasslands of sub-Saharan Africa, these are one of the largest breeds of tortoises in the world, growing up to weigh about two hundred pounds. Because of their huge sizes and large space requirements, these are not good choices for beginners.
Chapter 4 – Selecting the Right Turtle

So now that you’re sure you want a turtle, you can just walk into the pet store, say “One turtle, please, and no I don’t want fries with that,” and you’re done, right? Well, not quite.

If you want to ensure that your experience as a turtle owner is a pleasant one, you need to spend a little time making sure you take the right turtle home with you. At some point every pet owner is going to have to deal with one of their pets getting sick – you need to be willing to accept that if you’re going to own a pet – but that doesn’t mean you want to be bringing a sick animal home from the pet store with you. So how can you make sure that the turtle you get is in the best shape possible? Firstly, you need to consider where you want to purchase the turtle, then you’ll need to spend a little time ensuring that the specimen you choose is as healthy as can be.

Wild-Caught vs. Captive Bred

Not so long ago, a herpetologist looking to purchase a new turtle had no choices in this matter; pretty much all the turtles available were caught in the wild. The attitude was that there was no need for anyone to breed these creatures – there was, after all, a seemingly limitless supply of them crawling around out there in nature, so why would anyone invest the time and money in setting up a breeding program?

Well, as we are now abundantly aware, nature’s resources are not quite as limitless as we once thought, and this is as true of turtles as it is of anything else. Many species of giant turtles and sea turtles were commonly used as
food by sailors and explorers – they could be loaded onto a ship, and then could last months without food or water before being killed and eaten when the need arose. Because of this, and because of the capture of these creatures for sale as pets, some species are now extinct, and many more have dwindled to dangerously low populations.

If the dwindling populations in the wild weren’t enough of an incentive to create a breeding program, the basic fact of the matter is that wild turtles do not do well in captivity. Turtles that are used to roaming freely in the relative quiet of nature can become stressed out by the constant hustle and bustle of the average household. Furthermore, as the turtle discovers that it can’t escape from its surroundings, its stress level will increase. Add to this the effects of a change in diet and the turtle has a serious problem – the stress levels will affect the turtle’s immune system, making it prone to illness, and it may even refuse to eat, and eventually die. The statistics are sobering to say the least – less that 5% of wild caught turtles will survive their first year in captivity, which contrasts quite remarkably with the thirty to fifty year life span of a turtle.

To combat the dwindling populations of these creatures in the wild, many species are now being bred in captivity. This is great news for the prospective pet owner – not only are captive bred chelonians already adapted to the lifestyle you will be providing for them (they have never known any other), but they are also generally free from the health concerns that a wild turtle may pose. If they have been well looked after, unlike their wild cousins the captive-bred turtle will not be infested with internal parasite, harbor mites or ticks. Which is good news for you and your household.

All in all, there is little to be said for taking a wild turtle out of its natural habitat, and depriving the species of one more breeding partner down the road. And if you do come by a wild chelonian, be sure to take them to a veterinarian who specializes in reptiles immediately, and keep them quarantined for at least a month to ensure that any health problems the creature may have can be dealt with before any other animals are exposed to them.
Where to Find a Captive-Bred Turtle

Assuming you didn’t just find a Red-Eared Slider sunning itself in your back yard, there are three basic sources that you can purchase one from. Let’s take a look at the pros and cons of each option.

i. Breeders

One of your best choices for purchasing a turtle is from a local breeder. Local breeders often start off just like you, as pet owners. Because they breed their turtles as a hobby as much as anything else, they will tend to be very conscientious about the health and happiness of the animals under their care. Furthermore, they will be extremely knowledgeable about the details of keeping turtles, and as often as not will be glad to share their experience and knowhow with a beginner – more than just being a source for your turtles, a local breeder will be able to answer any questions you may have and offer invaluable advice to the new turtle owner.

The only problem you’ll encounter with attempting to purchase your new pet from a breeder will be finding one. You’ll want to enlist the help of your local herpetologist society to locate breeders in your area, but even if you are lucky enough to have a few of them nearby, you may still find that they don’t have the species you’re interested in – a hobbyist will usually only be able to breed a small number of species given the physical space and money required. However, if you are fortunate enough to find a breeder in your vicinity to source your turtle from, I would strongly advise you to take advantage of the opportunity.

If you are able to purchase your turtle from a local breeder, ask if you can view the parents, the offspring and the cage or enclosure before deciding to buy. This will give you a chance to determine whether your new pet has been well cared for – if all the turtles are healthy and alert, and their enclosures are
well kept, clean and tidy, the chances are that you’re purchasing a good specimen.

ii. **Mail Order**

Another source for your turtles is to purchase them mail order from a commercial breeder or dealer. Commercial breeders will tend not to specialize in individual species as your local breeder might, instead carrying a whole range of different species. You should be able to find a commercial breeder who can supply you with Red-Eared Sliders either through your herpetological society or by a quick search on the internet.

As with your local breeder, before you purchase a turtle from a mail order supplier you should request to see the parents and the enclosure that the turtle has been kept in – unless they’re located nearby, you’ll have to settle for a photograph. It’s important to get some idea of the environment the turtle has been kept in, especially with commercial breeders – remember, they’re in it for the money first and foremost, and what’s best for the turtle may not always be what’s best for the bottom line.

While they will be more likely to have a ready supply of the species you desire, a commercial breeder will be less interested in assisting you with any questions you might have about rearing your new pet – this is not a labor of love for them but a financial concern. Still, they are a good option for acquiring your turtle if you can’t find a reliable local breeder.

iii. **Pet Store**

Your final option is to try to find the turtle you want at your local pet store. While they won’t have the specific knowledge and experience of your local breeder, the pet store can be a valuable source
of basic information regarding caring for your new pet. Unlike with the commercial breeder, you will also have the opportunity to inspect the turtle you’re about to purchase, and to view it in its habitat to determine how it has been cared for.

The major downside to purchasing from a pet store is that they are not the ones who bred the animal you’re buying – they will typically buy their animals from a commercial breeder. This means that you have no idea where the animal came from. Sure, he may be in a nice clean cage now, with fresh food and water, but did he just arrive from a less conscientious breeder? There’s no way of telling.

Choosing a Healthy Turtle

Whether you decide to obtain your turtle from a local dealer or a pet store, you want to be as sure as you can that the turtle you’re taking home with you will live a long and happy life, right? So how do you tell a healthy turtle from one riddled with parasites? Well, there are a few simple visual signs that should point you in the right direction in determining whether a turtle is healthy.

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<th>Signs</th>
<th>Criteria</th>
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<td>The Eyes</td>
<td>The first things to look at when determining a turtle’s health are its eyes. A turtle’s eyes should be clear and bright. You should not see any sort of discharge or cloudy fluids present in a healthy turtle. If there is any swelling or crusty matter around the eyes, or if they are pasted shut, this should raise a big red flag with you to steer clear.</td>
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<tr>
<td>The Nose</td>
<td>A healthy turtle will have a clean nose and nostrils, and will breathe through its nose rather than its mouth. If you notice any mucus or other fluids bubbling around the nose, if the turtle is</td>
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breathing through its mouth, or if you can hear it breathing, these are all signs of a respiratory infection – unless you want to spend the first weeks with your new pet taking repeated visits to the vet, this is another turtle you will want to stay away from.

| The Legs | The skin around the legs should be fairly tight, with no folds or wrinkles. There should be no evidence of injury, bruising or swelling. If you pull gently on one of the turtle’s back legs, you should feel it pulling the leg away from you. If you don’t feel it pulling fairly strongly away, this is not the turtle for you. |
| The Shell | The turtle’s shell should be hard and firm – if it feels soft at all, or if you’re able to push it in with your fingertips, the turtle’s shell has not developed properly, probably as a result of a nutritional deficiency. There should be no signs of bleeding around the shell, and watch out for patches where the scales or scutes are missing or wrinkled – this indicates a damaged area that can easily become infected. Minor injuries to the shell are normal, but there should be no holes or cracks or other indicators of more major damage. |
| The Tail Area | Diarrhea is a certain sign that the turtle has an infection or is infested with parasites – neither of these are pleasant to deal with, so avoid a turtle that shows any such signs. |
| Weight | Turtles are surprisingly heavy for their size. Picking the turtle up in your hand, it should feel similar in weight to a shell full of water. If it feels too light, it may be an indicator that the turtle is not eating enough, which in turn generally means serious stress or health problems. |
| General Behavior | While you’re checking your prospective turtle’s health, pay attention to its general behavior. Your turtle may not be active around strangers, but it should be alert to its surroundings. If it feels threatened, the turtle may pull its head and legs into its shell – if it does, just wait a few minutes and it should come back out. If it doesn’t, this may be an indication that the turtle is either sick or has not adapted well to captivity. Either way, that may not be the turtle for you. You may also want to watch the turtle being fed – refusal to eat can be a sign that the turtle is overstressed, or that it has some other health problem, and should probably be avoided. |
Sex and Age of Your Turtle

There are some minor differences that you can use to determine the sex of your turtle – this is particularly important if you’re thinking of breeding turtles. Firstly, take a look at the turtle’s tail. The male will have a longer and thicker tail than the female. Also, the cloaca, which is the intestinal, reproductory and urinary opening located on the underside of the turtle’s tail, will be closer to the shell on the female. Additionally, the male turtle will have long front claws, which are used both in the mating ritual and to fight off rival turtles in territorial disputes. Both of these differences can be hard to discern if you’re just looking at one turtle, so it can be useful to compare a female and a male if you get the chance so that you’ll know what you’re looking for.

The important measurement in determining a turtle’s age is the length of its carapace, not including curvature. This is called the Straight Carapace Length. To measure this simply take a rigid rule and measure from the bottom of the shell at its tail to the top of the shell at its neck. Hatchlings will generally have a SCL of around 1”. After the first year it should be around 4” in length, at which point it is referred to as a yearling. Males will become sexually mature at this length, while females will reach maturity at around 5”. Adult red-eared sliders will range from 7” – 9” for males, 10” – 12” for females.

One important thing to note regarding the size of your turtle: since 1975 it has been illegal in the United States to sell turtle eggs, or hatchlings measuring less than 4”. This federal ban was put in place as a health measure as it was believed that baby red-eared sliders that were not properly cared were responsible for a salmonella outbreak. Bear in mind that if you’re being sold a turtle measuring less than 4” it is being offered illegally – do not buy it, and avoid doing business with a breeder who is willing to sell you such a creature.
Quarantine

So by now you’ve followed all of our advice and chosen the healthiest looking specimen you can from a reputable local breeder. Unfortunately, even with the most rigorous of inspections, there is no way of telling if the turtle you’ve purchased has a recently contracted health problem that just isn’t far advanced enough to be showing any symptoms yet. So how can you avoid the newcomer from spreading any illnesses it may be carrying to your existing reptiles? The answer is, a quarantine tank.

Your quarantine tank doesn’t need to be set up to be aesthetically pleasing – remember, this is only a temporary enclosure for your new turtles until you can be sure any undetected health problems have surfaced. Simplicity and functionality should be your watchwords here. A 10 or 20 gallon aquarium with water and a dry basking spot will be fine for the quarantine period, with full-spectrum ultraviolet lighting.

Your quarantine tank should preferably be kept in a separate room from any other reptile enclosure you may have. In addition, whenever you perform any of the regular tasks involving your enclosures (feeding the inhabitants, cleaning the tanks, or any other part of your routine), be sure to service the quarantine tank last. This will ensure that if any pathogens are present, you don’t transport them to the next enclosure on your list.

You’ll want to watch your new turtle carefully for thirty to forty-five days, inspecting it regularly for the same signs of illness as you looked for when purchasing it. In addition, you should keep a close eye on your turtle’s feces. If you notice thin objects in the feces resembling threads, this indicates that your turtle is infested with worms and will need to be taken to a veterinarian. In fact, now would be a good time to find a local veterinarian who is trained to
treat reptiles and amphibians. Get your new pet checked out by a veterinarian, including a fecal exam, to ensure that it is fit and well.

If your new turtle hasn’t shown any symptoms within thirty to forty-five days, and is still active, alert, and eating regularly, you can safely transfer it to its permanent home. Make sure you clean the quarantine habitat thoroughly with disinfectant or a strong saltwater solution. Never use any cleaning product containing pine oil or pine tar – these are extremely toxic to turtles, as well as many other reptile and amphibian species.

Changing Your Mind

It’s an unfortunate fact that some turtle owners are, at some point, going to decide that they no longer want to keep their pets. After all, these animals can live for up to forty years, which is longer than most marriages last! So what can you do if you need to give up your pet turtle?

The best option available is to contact your local herpetological society. Most societies will have some kind of adoption program, whereby they will try to match ownerless turtles with responsible and capable owners. Taking advantage of this program will ensure that your erstwhile pet is placed with someone who has the knowledge and resources to take good care of it.

If you can’t find a new owner through a herp society, you can try putting an ad in your local newspaper to see if you can find a new owner yourself. It’s important to vet any prospective owners if you do decide to go this route. Make sure that the person who is taking your pet knows what they are getting into. Check that they have the required knowledge to take care of the creature, and that they have sufficient space to create healthy habitat for your turtle, and that they have the resources to provide everything that the turtle will need, including visits to a reptile veterinarian if anything should go wrong. If you’re
not sure the turtle will be well cared for by a particular owner, then hold out until you can find someone you are sure about.

The only other option available to you would be to donate your turtle to a local zoo. However, most zoos will not take turtles from private owners, and the red-eared slider is not a particular rare or endangered species, so you are unlikely to find a zoo that will take your pet.

The one thing you cannot do with your unwanted turtle is release it into the wild. While the red-eared slider is native to North America, bear in mind that turtles bred in captivity are often subjected to a wide range of exotic diseases that may not be prevalent in your location. Releasing a captive bred turtle that may be carrying these diseases into the wild can literally decimate the local reptile populations. For this reason, releasing a captive turtle into the wild is illegal in many states, precisely because of the danger of releasing diseases and parasites into an unprepared population.
A Shopping List

Changing environments can be stressful for a turtle, even one that has been raised in captivity. To avoid moving your turtle around more than is necessary, it’s best to have your enclosure set up prior to bringing your new pet home. Here is a quick list of the absolute necessities to provide a decent habitat for your turtle:

- **Enclosure** – minimum of a 20 gallon aquarium or equivalent, depending on the number of turtles
- **Water heater** – 100 to 200 watts depending on enclosure size
- **Water filter**
- **UVA/UVB lamp**
- **Heat lamp** – this can be as simple as an incandescent light bulb and fixture
- **Thermometers**
- **Basking platform**
- **Lamp reflector**
- **Food supplies** – don’t assume your turtle has recently been fed by its previous owner
Chapter 5 – Creating a Healthy Environment For Your Red-Eared Slider

The first decision to make when preparing to set up your turtle’s habitat is whether you intend to go with an indoor or an outdoor enclosure. Either of these choices can be rewarding, so the decision of where to locate your turtle’s home is entirely a matter of personal choice. It should be noted, however, that if your climate is prone to cold winters and you opt for an outdoor habitat, you will need to bring your turtle indoors during the winters. In the wild the Red-Eared Slider will spend the coldest months in hibernation. It is not advisable to attempt to have your captive turtle hibernate, for reasons that we will go into later.

So let’s discuss your options for both an indoor and an outdoor habitat, including the advantages and disadvantages of each choice.

**Indoor Enclosures**

If you’re looking for more frequent interaction with your pet turtle, then an indoor enclosure can be beneficial. Having the habitat inside the house with you will mean that it’s more accessible to you, whatever the weather, and more convenient for you to follow your prescribed feeding schedule, while also providing far more opportunities for you to view and observe your pet in its enclosure. This can increase your enjoyment of your turtle, and it can also result in increasing your awareness of its normal behavior, and therefore make you more aware of changes in that behavior that may indicate a potential
health issue. The downside of this is that some turtles, even those bred in captivity, may find the hustle and bustle of a busy household stressful.

The more confined space of an indoor enclosure can similarly be both a blessing and a curse. While escapes are less likely for a turtle being kept within your home, and escapees far easier to track down, the restricted environment of an aquarium can also cause your turtles some anxiety. Furthermore, the house outside their habitat is an unnatural environment to them, so if they should escape from the enclosure they may be more likely to come to harm than if they were outdoors, especially if they begin their escape with a four foot drop from the top of an aquarium. On the other hand, of course, a turtle wandering about your carpet is less likely to be snatched up by a raccoon or one of their aerial predators than one roaming around the great outdoors.

Finally, keeping your turtle in an aquarium or similar within your house will make it much easier for you to regulate environmental factors, such as temperature, although the equipment needed to maintain a specific environment will run up the cost of keeping your pet.

If you do decide to go with an indoor habitat for your turtle, you have several viable containers for use as your pets enclosure.

**Glass/Acrylic Aquariums**

The most popular choice of enclosure is a glass or acrylic aquarium. This is probably going to be the most expensive option available, but most pet owners find it worth the cost as they do provide the best and most attractive way to enjoy watching your turtles. They are widely available from any pet store, and there are a plethora of accessories available to allow you to personalize your aquarium’s configuration.

There are several different styles of aquarium commonly available. Most will be appropriate for your turtle’s habitat, just ensure that there is ample horizontal and vertical space for them to swim in. Red-Eared Sliders are active swimmers, so you should avoid the “Tall” style tanks, as these will tend to have too little horizontal area for your pets to swim in. Tanks advertised as being made specifically for turtles are also, ironically, a bad choice. They tend to be designed for ease of maintenance rather than
structural rigidity, and the modifications that allow easier access to the water filter, for instance, also mean that they can hold significantly less water than the more standard tanks.

- **Plastic Storage Containers**
  A far cheaper, though perhaps less aesthetically pleasing option, is a simple Rubbermaid storage container. These can make good habitats for your turtles. Indeed, the opacity of the container, while it may detract from your enjoyment of being able to watch your turtles as easily, will provide them with some comforting privacy and shield them from their busy surroundings a little better than a transparent glass aquarium.

  Do bear in mind, however, that these storage containers are not designed to hold water, and be wary of overfilling them. One gallon of water weighs 8.3 lbs, so if you’re trying to create a 40 gallon habitat you’ll be looking at over 300 lbs. Don’t expect a storage container to survive that kind of pressure without some kind of supports being added to prevent bowing. Also, be careful to monitor this kind of enclosure carefully for any cracks that may begin to appear. One further downside to these containers is that you won’t find any standard accessory (water filters, lighting etc...) designed to fit them, so you’ll need to do some modifications to get them to work.

  If you’re looking for something cheap, and are willing to put in a little effort to reinforce the structure and modify your accessories to fit, this may be the best option for you.
Stock Tanks
Another comparatively inexpensive option is a plastic stock tank. Unlike storage containers, these tanks are specifically designed to hold water, so there’ll be no need to reinforce them. Like storage containers, they’re opaque, which will provide privacy for your turtles, though you will lose the underwater viewing that an aquarium provides. With a little work you should be able to get your accessories to work with these containers, and some models can even be fitted with a drain, which can be a godsend when it comes time to clean out the enclosure.

Stock tanks work well as a sturdy and inexpensive habitat for your turtle. You should be able to find them available at farm and tractor supply stores.

Custom and Preformed Ponds
Custom and preformed ponds can be a durable and inexpensive choice for your enclosure. These are the plastic ponds designed to be sunk into the ground to form outdoor pools, and as such will require a sturdy frame to be built around them to provide stability and additional support. If you’re sufficiently handy, and have a little extra time to spend undertaking this work, they can be one of the most creative and eye-catching choices of habitat, providing a far more natural look than any of the other options. Equipping your indoor pond with water filters, heaters and lights can also be a little more challenging with this setup, but you may feel it to be worth the extra effort if you want to bring a little of the outdoors into your home.

The suggestions listed above are only the most commonly used alternatives available to you. Any container that can safely hold a sufficient quantity of water can be adapted for use as a habitat for your Red-Eared Slider. Just be sure that your enclosure is large enough for the number of turtles you’ll be keeping in it – for juveniles, you’ll want to allow around ten gallons per turtle; for adults, twenty to forty gallons per pet is required. The more space they have
to swim in the happier they’ll be, but be sure that at a minimum the water is at least as deep as the length of your turtle’s shell.

Before setting everything up, you’ll also need to consider exactly where to locate your turtle’s enclosure. Firstly, look for somewhere that will be a relatively low traffic area to avoid undue stress for your turtles. At night the area must remain calm and dark to avoid disturbing your pets from their sleep. You’ll also want to avoid a location that will allow direct sunlight to shine on the enclosure, especially if it’s transparent. The sides of an aquarium will focus the sun rays and cause hot spots that could hurt your turtles.

A hood or cover for your enclosure is entirely optional. While they can be determined climbers, as long as you leave a sufficient gap between the turtle’s habitat and the top of their aquarium, there should be little chance of them escaping. However, it hoods do provide a convenient mounting for the aquariums light source.

If you choose to do without a hood, it’s important that you don’t expose your turtles to any cool drafts. Do not locate your enclosure near an open window or an air conditioning unit as this may result in your turtles developing a respiratory infection. Try to look for somewhere that will maintain a fairly constant temperature throughout the day, as the turtles will be exposed to room temperature air.

**Outdoor Enclosures**

An outdoor enclosure can be a great way to experience your turtles in their natural habitat, and you can be sure your turtles will enjoy it. Dealing with the constant buzz of human activities around
them can be stressful for your turtles, so they may be far more content to relax in the relative calm of your back yard.

As you might expect, creating a natural habitat for your pets outside will cut down on much of the maintenance that an indoor enclosure would entail. There’ll be no need to provide lighting, or UV exposure, as the sun will take care of those functions. You may still need to provide water filtration, unless the habitat contains enough aquatic plants to create a natural filtration cycle, and if your local climate isn’t warm enough you may also want to consider providing a water heater at certain times of the year. Still, allowing nature to take its course can provide some significant reductions in expensive supplies.

On the other hand, an outdoor enclosure can pose some challenges. Predators such as raccoons and some birds of prey become a definite threat, and a turtle that escapes in your back yard may never be seen again instead of turning up in your laundry room. You’ll also have less interaction with your pets, and if you live in an area with cold winters, you’ll still need to create an indoor habitat for the turtles to live in during the coldest parts of the year.

If you do decide to opt for an outdoor turtle pond, whether it be a preformed pond or stock tank sunk into the ground, or built from scratch with a flexible pond liner, location is once again key. You’ll need to take care to provide varying temperature spots around the habitat, with some areas in shade and others in direct sunlight. This will provide you Red-Eared Sliders with spots to bask in the heat and light of the sun, and other places where they can cool off when the days get too hot.

Since the open road is just a short walk away, you’ll need to build a wall or a fence around the area that your turtles will be living in. Make sure that it’s high enough to prevent escapees. Red-Eared Sliders are not proficient diggers, so you shouldn’t be overly worried about them tunneling out, but if they’ll be co-habiting the pond with more accomplished tunnelers you will need to be more conscientious about sinking the barrier deep enough in the ground to prevent escapes.
Lighting

Unless you intend to go with an outdoor enclosure, where nature will take care of all your turtle’s lighting needs, you’re going to need to provide your turtles with an artificial light source. When consider an appropriate light source, you need to be aware that your pets will actually require three different types of light.

- **Visible Light**
  Visible light is important to your turtles to keep their internal body clocks ticking along. Red-Eared Sliders are diurnal creatures, which means they’ll be awake and active in the daytime and inactive at night. Depriving them of sufficient light periods or dark periods will disrupt their sleep cycles and have serious repercussions for your turtle’s health. The best course here is to mimic nature – when it’s light outside, your enclosure lights should be turned on, and when it’s dark outside the enclosure should be too. This will ensure that your turtles aren’t over or under-exposed to light, as well as providing the requisite seasonal variety for them, which will become especially important for establishing a breeding season should you decide to go down that path. A simple timer from your local hardware store should allow you to set the lighting to create appropriate day and night periods.

- **UVA Rays**
  UVA exposure is also important to the health of your chelonian. This shorter wavelength light helps to promote natural behavior in your turtle; without it you may find that they become inactive, refuse to feed, and become incapable of mating. In extreme cases, they may exhibit signs of mental illness, even become aggressive and violent.
UVB Rays

Ever had sunburn? If you have, you have UVB rays to thank for it. For humans, UVB light can be dangerous, causing sunburn and even skin cancer. But for turtles, a sufficient exposure to UVB rays is vital to their health. A turtle requires UVB light to stimulate production of vitamin D3 within their bodies. Without this vitamin, your chelonian will be unable to absorb the calcium that they ingest in their diet. Both calcium and vitamin D3 are vitally important to maintaining strong bones, and preventing health issues such as Metabolic Bone Disease or soft-shell syndrome.

So how can you provide for all your turtle’s lighting requirements?

If you want an all-in-one solution, there are “full-spectrum” fluorescent light bulbs made for use in reptile enclosures that will supply visible light, as well as UVA and UVB rays. Be aware that not all fluorescent or full-spectrum bulbs supply the required UVA and UVB outputs. Your best option is to check the packaging – if it doesn’t say that it’s specifically designed for use in reptile enclosures, don’t buy it.

Unfortunately, fluorescent light bulbs won’t give off much, so if you want to provide basking heat for your turtles along with their lighting, you may want to look at a mercury vapor bulb. These are significantly more expensive than the fluorescent option, but if located above your turtle’s basking area they can do double duty. These bulbs do give off a lot of heat, however, so they should not be used in a smaller tank where they may raise the temperature too high.

Alternatively, you may decide to opt for a multipurpose hood that contains multiple lighting fixtures; mounting an incandescent bulb, to provide heat and visible light, and a fluorescent bulb that emits ultraviolet rays, will equally provide for all of your turtle’s needs.

Whichever option you choose, make sure you mount the lights the correct distance from your turtles to provide the optimum concentration of ultraviolet rays. The lights should ideally be between twelve and eighteen inches from the top of your turtle’s shell. Ensure that there’s nothing between the bulb and your turtles – sunlight loses 98% of its UV light passing through glass, and even screen coverings and water can dissipate the effectiveness of your UV source. For this reason, the best location for whichever UV source you may choose is
over the basking area, where the turtles will be out of the water and exposed to the full concentration of UV rays.

Finally, bear in mind that fluorescent tubes lose effectiveness over time. Even if your bulb doesn’t burn out, you should replace it every six months to ensure that the turtle’s light source is still emitting the required concentration of UV light. There’s no way for you to visually detect how much ultraviolet light is being produced, so keeping a relatively fresh bulb in will ensure that you aren’t inviting health issues with your pets.

**Heat**

Like most other reptiles, turtles are ectothermic or cold-blooded creatures. This means that they are incapable of creating the heat that they need to keep their bodily functions going, and must rely on an outside heat source to keep their internal body temperature up. In the wild, or in outdoor enclosures, the sun will provide the heat they need, but if you’re housing your turtle indoors you’ll need to provide heating for both its environments – water and land.

Red-Eared Sliders will require a fairly warm aquatic environment – around 75 to 80 degrees Fahrenheit would be ideal. The first thing you’ll want to invest in is an aquarium thermometer. You should be able to find something fairly cheap that will attach to the side of your turtle’s tank.

Warming the water should be done by use of a submersible water heater. This is typically a glass tube housing a heating element, which will hook over the lip of your tank and extend down into the water. Adjust the output of this heater before you populate this tank, using the thermometer to ensure that the tank is operating at the correct temperature.
There are a couple of caveats to these submersible heaters when used with your Red-Eared Slider. Firstly, your turtle is larger and heavier than the average fish, and if it bumps against the heater hard enough and knocks it against the tank it can easily crack. The turtles may also attempt to climb up the heater, and end up pulling the whole contraption down into the water, which poses a serious risk of electrocution.

To avoid these possible hazards, you have a couple of options. One is to mount the heater so that instead of hanging in the open water, it instead sits inside the water filter. This will allow it to heat the water as it circulates without being exposed to your turtles. If you decide to do this, just be sure that the heater isn’t in contact with the filter itself, as it may melt the plastic over time and render your filter useless.

The other option to keep your submersible heater safe is to use a large pile of rocks to protect it from your turtles. You’ll need to arrange them in such a way that the turtles cannot get to the heater, while ensuring that the water will circulate freely around the heater.

There are a couple of other options offered on the market for aquarium heater. Most pet stores will carry undertank heaters and heating tape, but both of these alternatives should be avoided – the risk of electrocution, either of your pets or even yourself, in the case of a water leak them an unacceptable risk.

**Basking**

In addition to ensuring that the water temperature is at an acceptable level for your turtles, you need to be aware of the importance of basking to your pets. Red-Eared Sliders are amphibious creatures, meaning that they will require both water and land areas in their enclosure. The basking area performs two functions: firstly, it allows the turtles
to dry off, which prevents fungus from building up on them. Secondly, having an area of higher temperature will help them to regulate their body temperature, given them a place to soak in some heat when they need it.

The basking area should be located at one end of your enclosure. It needs to be large enough to allow all of your turtles to comfortable bask at the same time – you don’t want a turtle to be crowded into the water when it needs to be basking and resting. At the same time, your turtles will be far more active when they’re in the water, so the land portion of their habitat should only be around half the size of water surface.

There are a few different ways of creating a basking area in your tank. One choice would be to cut a piece of wood so that it will just fit inside the tank, then wedge it in place with thin wooden inserts. Be sure to slant the wood if you do this, as it’s important that some of the land is submerged below the water, with a gradual incline to allow your turtles to easily exit the water. They will not be able to pull themselves up onto a platform entirely at or above water level. One problem with the wooden platform is that it may absorb some of the water causing it to expand and push against the sides of the tank, which could lead to water leaks. Be careful to choose a wood that will be relatively water-resistant to avoid this problem.

Another option for your land area is to simply stack flat rocks from the bottom of the tank until they reach up above the surface, forming an underwater cave and a basking area. If you choose to go this route, make sure that your stack of rocks is absolutely stable and won’t collapse or tip over when the turtles attempt to emerge from the water. Again, you will also need to ensure that there’s a gradient from a slightly submerged area up to the dry section to allow your turtles to climb out.

Your final option is to create a split-section aquavivarium. To do this you’ll need to section off a third of your aquarium with a vertical strip of plastic or glass reaching from the bottom of the tank to about two-thirds of the way up. Fill the larger section with water up to the level of your dividing barrier. Then create your dry area from the bottom up with soil and substrate and landscape
it to form a living vivarium. A ramp of wood or rocks will need to be provided for the turtles to climb from water to land. This is by far the more complicated set up, and will take a lot of time both to set up and maintain, but it can definitely be the most enjoyable visually.

Once your basking area is set up, you’ll need to think about how to heat it. Bear in mind that this area only needs to be around ten to fifteen degrees Fahrenheit warmer than the aquatic section – around 90 to 95 degrees works well. Because of this you may find that if your light source emits a significant amount of heat, such as an incandescent light bulb, a halogen light, or a mercury vapor light, this may be enough to elevate your basking area to the required temperature. You’ll need a separate thermometer placed around the basking area to see if this is the case, preferably one with a remote display that can remain outside the tank.

If your light source doesn’t create enough heat, or if you’re using a fluorescent light that doesn’t act as a heat source, then you may want to look at either investing in a red heat bulb (this will emit heat while being almost undetectable visually to your turtle’s, which means it can remain on even in the night) or a ceramic heat emitter. Either of these should fit into a standard hood’s light fixtures.

Substrate

As far as the aquatic area of your tank is concerned, you have several options for substrate, including having no substrate at all. In fact, omitting a substrate from the water will keep the water cleaner, increase the efficiency of the filtration system, and make water changes and tank cleaning a lot easier.

That said, your turtles will enjoy having a substrate to rummage around
in, so feel free to include one if you so desire. River rocks make the best substrate – they’re smooth enough that your turtles won’t be injured by them, and large enough that they can’t accidentally be ingested.

Sand can also be a good choice – it’s soft enough to avoid injury, and if swallowed is small enough to pass harmlessly through your turtle’s system. However, it will make keeping your enclosure clean a lot more challenging, and can clog up your filter and decrease its efficiency. If you can stay on top of these issues, however, it can form a visually pleasing base for your tank.

One substrate that should be avoided at all costs is gravel. Not only can the sharp edges of your gravel scratch and scrape your turtles, but also it’s large enough to be swallowed without being small enough to pass through, causing impaction and possibly prolapse in your turtle. Glass and plastic marbles, pebbles or beads should also be avoided. These are generally cheaply made, and if the crack they can become dangerously sharp.

With respect to the basking area, a moss substrate will work best, as it will cover any sharp edges in your platform with a soft and absorbent covering.

**Furnishings**

There are several types of furnishings that you should or can include in your turtle’s enclosure.

- **Hiding Places**
  Red-Eared Sliders are solitary creatures that do require their privacy at times, especially if they’re feeling stressed out or threatened. Underwater, fake or live aquatic plants can provide areas of cover that will help your turtles to feel secure. Bear in mind that any live plants that you include will probably be nibbled on by your chelonians, so make sure that they are all safe for your pets to ingest. In the basking area, a cave created from a pile of rocks, or even something as simple as a large piece of PVC piping, can provide a nice hiding place for when the turtle wants some privacy. Just make sure, as with all the furnishings, that the hiding places are non-toxic, that
the turtle cannot become trapped inside or behind them, and that they are secured in place to avoid injury to your pets.

- **Nesting Area**
  If you have a female turtle, it is imperative that you set up a nesting area for her. Even if you don’t intend to set up a breeding program, your females must have somewhere to lay their eggs or they’ll face serious health problems (discussed in more detail later).

A nesting area need be no more than a slightly moist spot of sand and soil mixed with compost. This will be covered in further detail in the section on breeding.

- **Plants**
  Live plants can be used to give your enclosure some character, but there are a few things to bear in mind. Firstly, any live plants you provide will likely be nibbled on, and some of these will be toxic to your turtles. Coleus, crocus, impatiens, poinsettia, Spanish bayonet, trumpet vine and Virginia creeper should all be avoided for this reason.

  Not only may the plants be harmful to your turtle, but your turtles are almost certain to be harmful to the plants. Between eating them, trampling on them, and digging them up on a regular basis, you may find it easier to simply go with artificial plants. These will be subjected to the same treatment, but are going to be far harder for your turtles to destroy.
Decorations

Anything you want to include as decorations should be fine as long as you follow some pretty commonsense rules. Decorations must be non-toxic to your turtles, should not be ingestible or have sharp or abrasive surfaces. Do not include anything containing paint. It’s often a good idea to clean disinfect anything you want to include that you’ve gathered from natural sources to remove any parasites – simply soak them overnight in a three-percent bleach or strong salt solution, then carefully rinse of any trace of the disinfectant.

Cleanliness

The first step to keeping a clean and healthy enclosure is setting up an adequate water filtration system for the aquatic section of your tank. Allow the water to stagnate will encourage the growth of algae and other pests, as well as creating breeding grounds for salmonella organisms that can pose a threat to both your health and your turtle’s. Furthermore, aquatic turtles such as Red-Eared Sliders will not excrete their feces on land, only in the water, where it will quickly dissolve, releasing ammonia and urea. Soil and other substrates may also be dragged into the water when your turtles go for a swim, and they’ll often drop crumbs of food in there as well which will release toxins as they decay.

Filters

Aquarium filtration systems are widely available at any good pet store, but there these are designed with fish-filled aquariums in mind, so some care will need to be taken when choosing one for a reptile enclosure.

Generally speaking, you will want to obtain a power filter. These units will hook onto the outside of your aquarium pulling water in through a long plastic
intake tube, sucking it through a layer of glass wool and activated charcoal to clean and purify the water, and then returned to the tank through a trough. Bear in mind when you look for the right filter that while the filters are handily labeled with the size of tank they should be used for, these are for fish-filled aquariums. Turtles are larger than fish, and will create far more waste for the filter to clean up, so you would be well advised to go for a filter two sizes larger than suggested. For the largest tanks (55 gallons or more) you’ll probably need to obtain more than one filter to keep the water fresh and clean.

When installing your filters it’s important to remember that, just like the submersible water heaters, the filter’s intake tube will be susceptible to being damaged by the turtles. In addition, if your enclosure contains any smaller turtles, there is a risk of them being sucked up and trapped against the intake tube’s opening, where they will be stuck until they drown. For these reasons, you’ll want to protect it as you would the submersible heater – create a screen of rocks around the tube to prevent any accidents befalling your turtles or your filter system.

**Cleaning and Maintenance**

Even with the most powerful water filter you can find, it will still be necessary to perform regular partial water changes. Filters can remove solid waste or food particles, but they cannot remove the ammonia that these pollutants will release into the water as they dissolve or degrade, so removing and replacing a portion of the water is the only way to acid such toxins become too concentrated.

Replacing half the water every two to four weeks is a good way to go, especially if you can use a different container to feed your turtles in (this will reduce the amount of uneaten food finding its way into the water). The water you use to refill the tank should be at a similar temperature to remaining water, and if it is heavily chlorinated you’ll also want to allow it to stand in an open container for a day so that any toxic compounds within the water can dissipate.
The filter itself will also require maintenance, but fortunately this is a simple procedure. The filter elements are disposable, so when you notice it has become loaded with detritus, simply pull it out and replace. The power filter itself should be pulled out and scrubbed with water and an old toothbrush whenever you perform a partial water change, as should the other tank accessories.

The inside of the enclosure itself can be cleaned with white vinegar whenever you notice a buildup of algae or stains. Do not use bleach or any other cleaning product as these are frequently toxic to your turtles.
Chapter 6 – Feeding Your Slider

As with any other animal, a turtle will only be as healthy as the diet that you provide it. Red-Eared Sliders require a balanced diet, including both animal (especially for younger turtles who need the protein for growth) and vegetable matter (which they will tend to gravitate more towards as they grow older). A sufficient source of calcium is also important, especially to young turtles and females.

**Water Requirements**

One thing you will not have to worry about with your Red-Eared Slider is providing a source of drinking water. Sliders are unable to use their tongue like you or I do to manipulate our food down towards our stomachs; instead they rely on a rush of water to push their food into their digestive system. This means that every time your turtle feeds, it will be taking in a fair amount of water right along with its food.

Because of this inaccurate method of swallowing food, attempting to chase it down underwater, eating can be a messy endeavor for a turtle. For this reason you may want to consider providing a separate container for your turtle to feed in. A small aquarium will do the trick for this purpose, although anything that can hold enough water for the turtle to submerge and swim around will work. Simply place the turtle in the feeding container and introduce the food. Once it’s done feeding, wash the turtle gently with warm water, to remove any stray scraps of food, and return it to its habitat. Wash out the feeding container as well, and it will be ready for the next meal.
If you have any hatchlings in your enclosure (turtles that are less than one year old), their main food source should be commercially available turtle pellets fed to them on a daily basis. Pellets specifically designed for turtles offer a complete and balanced nutritional diet for your baby turtles, including a high percentage of protein, usually up around 40%. For yearlings and adults (turtles more than one year old), this is too much protein. At this point you should drop to only supplying pellets every other day, with a far greater part of their diet being filled with vegetables.

Unfortunately, the packaging on your turtle pellets’ container will probably have a pretty vague suggestion for how much to feed, such as telling you to provide as much as the turtle will consume in one sitting. A good guideline used by most turtle owners is to provide a serving about as large as your turtle’s head at each feeding. If your turtle continues to show signs of hunger, introduce vegetables or live food to provide the rest of their nutrition.

If you have trouble getting your Red-Eared Slider to eat the pellets you provide, you may want to try dipping them in some tuna water – this will infuse them with a strong taste and flavor that your turtle will find extremely appetizing.
Vegetative Food Sources

The right combination of vegetables can provide an excellent source of vitamins A and K, as well as supplement your turtle’s calcium intake. Aquatic plants can also be used to feed your turtle, especially if you can find ones that would be native to your pet’s natural habitat. In fact, for older turtles, their diet should be around 75% plant based, whereas younger turtles will need to eat more animals than plants. Not all vegetables are suitable for your turtle, of course; some may block iodine or calcium absorption, both of which are vital to your pet’s health.

The most beneficial plants for your Red-Eared Sliders are things like dandelion leaves, green leaf lettuce, red leaf lettuce and turnip leaves. These should be a regular part of your adult turtle’s diet, and should also be offered to younger turtles, although they will not show as much interest in them.

There are a lot of other vegetables that can also be advantageous in small quantities, though you will not want to provide them on a daily basis. Carrots, endives, escarole, chicory, green beans, kale, pumpkins, romaine lettuce, squash, sweet potatoes and zucchini all fall into this category; they will all provide good nutritional value to your pet if used sparingly. Fruits such as melon, mango, papaya and prickly pear pads should also be included here.

Other vegetables, such as collard greens, iceberg lettuce, mustard greens, red peppers and tomatoes, as well as most fruits not already listed above, can also be fed to your turtle as a rare treat, or to add a little variety to its diet, but they will add little nutritional value to your turtle’s diet, and in the case of collards especially, can be harmful in larger quantities.

Finally, some vegetables will be downright harmful to your turtle: Amaranth, beet greens, bok choy, broccoli, brussel sprouts, cabbage, celery,
chard, chives, mushrooms, parsley, peas, rhubarb and spinach have nothing to offer in terms of nutrition and may cause health problems, so avoid ever using these vegetables as food.

No matter which fruits or vegetables you might choose to provide, always select fresh over frozen, as they will offer far more nutritional value. Also, be sure to wash the food thoroughly before introducing them to your turtle’s feeding container.

As far as aquatic plants are concerned, the following would be good choices to provide for your turtles to nibble on: Amazon swords, anacharis, duckweed, frogbit, hornwit, nasturtium, pondweed, water fen, water hyacinth, water lettuce, water lily, water milfoil and water starwort. While these will all provide a good natural food source for your Red-Eared Slider, bear in mind they will be an extremely expensive source of nutrition compared to the vegetables previously listed.

Animal-based Foods

Red-Eared Sliders are pretty omnivorous (meaning they’ll eat anything), so there’s a wide variety of animal-based foods that you can offer your turtle, but there are some concerns to be aware of when turning to these food sources. Small turtles can be damaged by larger prey, or by prey with tough exoskeletons. Many fish contain thiaminase, which is an enzyme that destroys vitamin B1 in the body. Similarly, shellfish often contain bacteria that can cause shell rot, and may be high in purines, which are also harmful to your pet in large quantities.

On the other hand, some live prey can be gut-loaded or dusted with calcium, which is vitally important to your turtle to grow and maintain a strong shell. They can also be used to entice a turtle that is stressed out and unwilling to eat to feed. And of course, it can be an exciting event for both turtle and owner for your pet to hunt down its own food.

So what types of animal products can you feed your turtle?
**Live Aquatics**

Live aquatic prey can be a good treat for your turtle, but be aware that even store bought specimens may contain parasites or disease – inspect the creatures you’re buying to feed your turtle as carefully as you did the turtle itself. Freshwater snails, such as the apple snail or pond snail, are generally good choices, as well as feeder fish like guppies and rosy red minnows. Mosquito larvae, ghost shrimp and brine shrimp can also be offered on occasion, but should not be overused. Crayfish and goldfish should be avoided completely.

If you notice that your turtle has trouble catching the live prey you introduce, you may want to try stunning or killing them before offering them.

**Live Insects/Worms**

Some insects can also be used as a treat, and can be cheap too if you catch them in your own back yard. You do need to be careful of any herbicides or pesticides that may be used in your area, however, as these may well have worked their way into the insects and may result in poisoning your turtles. Insects do not generally offer much nutritional value to your turtle, although they can be gut-loaded with calcium to supplement your turtle’s consumption of that vital mineral. Pinhead crickets, earthworms and silkworms are general good choices, while waxworms can also be offered on a less regular basis. Avoid giving your turtle mealworms, slugs or tubifex worms.

*(For simplified cricket breeding techniques, please check it out at: [www.CricketBreedingMadeSimple.com](http://www.CricketBreedingMadeSimple.com))*

**Other**

Boiled egg whites, boiled white chicken or turkey meat, canned salmon or canned tuna are all acceptable treats for your turtle. In
addition, you may be tempted to feed your turtles many other foods that are intended for humans or other animals. However, you should not add anything to your turtle’s diet without careful research regarding how it might affect your turtle’s health.

Supplements

The most important supplement that you’ll want to consider providing for you turtle is calcium. Calcium is vitally important to your turtle’s health and wellbeing for proper shell and bone development. It’s important to ensure that your turtle is taking in more calcium than phosphorous; indeed, the required amount of calcium for turtles is normally listed as a ratio of calcium to phosphorous. Adult turtles should receive between 1.5 to 2.5 times as much calcium as they are consuming phosphorous, and for egg bearing females and hatchlings this number should be even higher.

One inexpensive way of provide your turtles with additional calcium is to remove the hard backing from some cuttlebone and provide small bite-sized pieces for your turtle to chew. You should be able to find cuttlebone available in the bird section of your local pet store.

Another option is to purchase a phosphorous-free calcium powder to dust your turtle’s food with. If you don't believe your turtle is receiving sufficient UVB rays in its basking area, you can also find these powders with a vitamin B3 supplement included.

There are several other vitamin supplements available that are produced specifically for reptiles. While calcium and either vitamin B3 or an adequate UVB source are the most important nutritional considerations, there are other requirements for a healthy turtle. While your turtle’s diet should be providing most of these needs already, if you are concerned that your turtle may be deficient in anything you should feel free to supplement your pet’s diet as required.
Chapter 7 - Red-Eared Slider Reproduction

There may come a time during the course of your caring for turtles when you begin to wonder if you can successfully breed them. Before you do so, consider the reasons why you want to breed your red-eared sliders. Is it to help with conservation efforts? Is it to make your pets happy? Is it to sell off the hatchlings as a source of income?

All of these may seem like good reasons on the surface, but in actuality, breeding red-eared sliders is not recommended. Conservation of this species isn’t necessary. They aren’t on the brink of extinction, they’re not endangered, and they aren’t threatened. In fact, in many parts of the world, they’re considered an invasive, overpopulated species.

While your turtles may be happier to have a group of males and females together – after all, reproduction is a natural part of life and satisfies their natural instincts – the effort of breeding and the energy it takes on the part of the female to lay her eggs may not be worth the risk to her health. In any case, never allow a weak or smaller female to breed.

There’s also the matter of trying to sell off the hatchlings. In many states, it’s illegal to try to sell a hatchling that is less than four inches in size. In order for a turtle to reach that size, it will take years of effort and care on your part. For a red-eared slider, a male will reach that size in about 2 to 4 years, and a female will reach it in 3 to 5. That’s a very long time to wait before selling off your stock!

Although it’s not advisable to breed red-eared sliders, you should still know about this important part of their life cycle. The information in this chapter is provided for educational purposes and for curiosity’s sake.
Breeding Your Red-Eared Sliders

In order to breed your red-eared sliders, you need at least one male and one female that have reached sexual maturity. For males, this is at around 4 inches SCL (straight carapace length, which is the length of the carapace from front to back, ignoring the curvature of the shell), and for females this is at around 5 inches SCL. Most red-eared sliders reach this size at around 4 to 5 years of age.

When it comes time to breed, the male will attempt to get the female’s attention through a courtship ritual. He will swim in front of her, moving backwards, so that they are face to face, and he will flutter his forearms and long nails at her face. If she is willing, she will allow him to mount her from behind and position his tail beneath hers. His penis will protrude from the cloacal opening, touching her cloaca, while he releases his front legs and stabilizes in a vertical position against her.

Courtship and mating usually occurs through the months of March to June, and the female may become gravid after two to three weeks. Captive red-eared sliders, on the other hand, may try to breed all throughout the year.

The Eggs

When the female is gravid, which means she is carrying eggs in her body, she will need a nest where she can lay them. Even without the presence of a male or a successful mating, she may still be gravid. The eggs she lays will simply be unfertilized and will have to be removed before they rot. To check to see if your female is gravid, you can feel around between the carapace and in front of her rear legs, but be very careful, because too much pressure can result in breaking the eggs inside of her.
Your red-eared slider will instinctively want to lay, and she will begin to frantically dig at her enclosure with her hind legs. She will also become very restless, and she may even try to escape her enclosure with more effort than usual. During this time, you will need to provide her with more calcium and UVB rays, and you will also need to provide her with a proper nesting area. If she doesn’t lay in a nest, she may end up laying her eggs in the water, or worse yet, she may retain them or reabsorb them. If she has laid only one in the water, you still need to provide a nest. Chances are that the entire clutch was not laid, and she is still gravid. Typically, a female will produce about twenty eggs in a clutch, and she will produce about 3 or 4 clutches per season.

If your female is not provided with a suitable nesting area, some serious health problems may result. Egg-binding, egg retention or dystocia can be caused. The eggs can rot, weaken or even calcify, and if they become brittle, they may break inside of her body, causing internal injuries, infections, peritonitis or death.

If you suspect your female is retaining her eggs, and she cannot lay even though she is trying, you will have to take her to a veterinarian to determine if there’s an obstruction. If she passes a foul-smelling liquid, it’s possible an egg has fractured and begun to rot. Immediate medical attention is required.

The Nest

A female red-eared slider can be very picky about where she wants to nest. The more natural an environment it is, however, the better. A nesting area should have a substrate of dry soil, and you can use a 50/50 mixture of sand and organic compost for this. For a larger female, the layer should be about 12 inches deep, and all of the rocks, stones and roots should be removed. If the female encounters resistance of any sort, she may stop digging.

Nests are dug with the hind feet in alternating scoops, and once she has begun, don’t disturb her until she has finished. Once the eggs are laid, she will cover them with dirt to hide them from predators. After she has laid the eggs, you should remove them and discard them. Again, it should be
mentioned that actually incubating the eggs and breeding sliders is not recommended for various reasons.

However, to successfully incubate the eggs, it’s important that you do not turn them the way you would turn a bird’s eggs. Their position must remain as it is, because the yolk attaches itself to the side of the egg, and turning it could rip delicate membranes and possibly kill the embryo inside.

If you leave the eggs in the original nest and it happens to be outdoors, make sure that you protect the area from predators. If you cannot leave them where they are, then you will need to provide an incubator. Mark the top of the egg with a water-based marker to take note of the top position, then transfer the eggs into a plastic container. One about the size of a shoebox should suffice for the task. Fill it with moist vermiculite and drill ventilation holes in the lid. Keep the temperature at around 81 to 86 degrees Fahrenheit (27.2 to 30 degrees Celsius).

Interestingly, whether or not you get a male or a female depends upon the temperature the eggs are incubated at. Males are produced at the cooler end of the spectrum, and females are produced at the warmer end. The transitional range will produce a mixture of males and females.

Provided all has gone well, your eggs will hatch in 60 to 80 days. A hatchling will emerge by slicing at the egg with its egg tooth, which is a sharp growth on its beak that eventually falls off after hatching. The hatchling may still have the yolk sac attached to its body, which it will slowly absorb. Until it does, don’t try to remove it or disturb it, and don’t be surprised if the hatchling shows no interest in eating until it’s gone.

Caring for the Young

At the earliest stages of life, the hatchling is the most vulnerable. They have high mortality rates, are the most fragile, are the most susceptible to illnesses, and most just don’t often live beyond this
period. Sometimes they die for reasons unknown and unapparent. Good care, however, will greatly increase the hatchling’s chances for survival.

Before your hatchling emerges from his egg, his new enclosure should be set up and ready to go. He will need to be fed every day once his yolk sac is absorbed, and he will need clean water. The temperatures of the water and the basking area need to remain consistent and warm. Resist the temptation to excessively handle the hatchling, no matter how cute it appears. Your baby red-eared slider is very fragile and very susceptible to stress, and until it becomes acclimated to its surroundings, it is easily frightened. Remember, stress can kill.

Do not place the enclosure in direct sunlight or near a window, and keep it away from all drafts and air conditioners. Make sure that the hatchling can easily reach a basking platform, and that it has a basking lamp, UVA and UVB rays. The temperatures should be kept at 80 degrees Fahrenheit (26.6 degrees C) for the water and 90 degrees Fahrenheit (32.2 degrees C) for the basking area. The main diet should consist of calcium-fortified pellets.

Above all, don’t put small hatchlings in with larger adults. Keep the hatchlings all to their own enclosure, because the adults may attack and try to eat the hatchlings.
Chapter 8 - Common Health Problems and Symptoms to Watch Out For

When it comes to health, red-eared sliders are generally hardy turtles who rarely need a lot of medical attention. They’re disease-resistant, and as long as they’re treated properly and kept safe, there shouldn’t be any issues with wounds or trauma. Still, there’s always the possibility that something could go wrong. Falls can and do happen, and even with the best of care, there’s always a risk that disease can be passed along. In addition to that, if the turtle isn’t properly fed, he can develop some potentially life-threatening disorders.

It’s important to learn to recognize the symptoms of a sick turtle and handle them quickly. Some are minor problems that can be handled at home, but other, more serious issues need to be taken to a veterinarian straight away.

Finding a Good Veterinarian

The first step is also, quite possibly, the most difficult one of all. Finding a good reptile veterinarian can require a lot of searching on your part, and once found, you might have a long commute to reach his office if you’re living in a rural area or a small town. Most veterinarians these days have training in taking care of small animals like dogs and cats, and they have little practical experience with reptiles and amphibians outside of a few courses in anatomy and physiology. Don’t trust one of these veterinarians to know how to properly take care of your turtle. They are vastly different from mammals and metabolize certain medicines in different ways. As it
stands, most reputable veterinarians who have so little experience will be forthright with you about the issue and refuse to see your turtle at all.

Unless you live in or near a large urban area, you are not likely to find an experienced veterinarian. However, you can begin your search with your local herpetological society and ask for help. These societies deal with qualified veterinarians on a regular basis, especially in matters of adoptions and rescues. It’s also very likely that competent reptile vets are members of the society themselves.

Another option is to check with the local wildlife rehabilitation center or a zoo and ask for their help. They may be able to give you the names and contact information of qualified vets. You might also check online for information about veterinarians in your state, or go through the phone book, find any veterinarian, then ask them for their recommendations.

It’s important that you find a good veterinarian before you even bring your turtle home. Once you’ve found a possible candidate, you’ll need to ask him several questions. Make sure he is a member of the Association of Reptile and Amphibian Veterinarians then ask about his experience and any other questions you may have. Make sure that he’s accepting new patients. Don’t hesitate to look for second opinions either. The health of your turtle is well worth it.

Once you have found a suitable veterinarian, set an appointment for an initial check-up. Not only will this give you an opportunity to get acquainted with the vet, it will also give him an opportunity to get acquainted with you and your turtle. At the check-up, the vet should check for external parasites and symptoms of the most common diseases, then weigh and measure him. These things will help to establish what is normal and provide a basis for comparison when something appears to be wrong.
Wounds

Minor scrapes, abrasions and other sorts of wounds can be treated by dabbing on a small amount of antibiotic cream like Neosporin. Keep your red-eared slider out of the water for about ten to twenty minutes to give the cream a chance to soak into the skin. Letting him go straight back into the water means that it will only wash right off again. An alternative is to soak your turtle in a separate tank of water treated with an antibiotic like Betadine. A ten minute soaking twice a day should be sufficient, and be sure to rinse off the turtle with clean water before returning him to his normal tank.

If your turtle is already healthy, then his own healing systems should take care of the wounds with minimal help from you. Keep an eye on it, but it should heal up well enough by itself within a few weeks. The same goes for minor burns, such as the kind that can be received with improper housing, from exposed heat lamps or a sizzle stone.

In the event of any falls, drops or animal attacks, which may result in more serious trauma, you will need to quickly examine your turtle to assess the damage. There may be a cracked shell, broken bones or deeper cuts. If your turtle has gone into shock or is unconscious, don’t try to force it awake or back into the water. Instead, take him to the vet as quickly as possible for treatment.
Respiratory Infections

Common to captive turtles and highly contagious, the chances of your red-eared slider developing a respiratory infection are heightened when he doesn’t have proper basking or water temperatures. Exposures to drafts or breezes weaken his immune system and make him more susceptible. There are varying degrees of infections, and depending on how severe the infection, the symptoms may vary.

The first sure sign that your turtle is sick is when he is listing, which is swimming in an irregular manner, like in circles, unevenly, lopsided or upside down. This is caused by fluid in the lungs, and if you see your turtle exhibiting this symptom, he needs to be taken to the vet immediately for treatment. Note that your turtle may still have a respiratory infection even without this symptom.

Other symptoms which can signal an RI include breathing difficulties, coughing, sneezing, opening of the mouth, yawning, lethargy, loss of appetite, mucus coming from the nose or mouth, or bubbling at the nose or mouth. If you find your red-eared slider exhibiting any of these symptoms, immediately isolate him to a warm tank, eliminating all drafts and cold air, and change the water. Keep a close eye on the turtle, and if the symptoms persist for more than a few days, contact your veterinarian for an appointment. If an RI is left untreated, in many cases, the turtle will develop pneumonia, which is almost always fatal.
**Intestinal Troubles**

There are many indications of intestinal trouble when it comes to turtles. Any changes in eating habits with a red-eared slider could indicate an infection or illness, or your turtle may begin to void smelly, slimy feces that quickly turn the water into a cesspool.

Blood from the cloaca is cause for serious concern, and there are several causes for it. This could be due to impaction or injury as well as illness, and a veterinarian can determine the problem. Try to obtain a sample of the turtle’s feces to take with you to the vet for analysis.

Vomiting is also a cause for concern. Sometimes it can occur normally, but if the vomit contains anything other than material from a recent meal, collect a sample to take the vet for examination. Frequent occurrences of throwing up could also mean a respiratory infection.

Constipation is a more minor problem, but impaction is serious and potentially deadly, often requiring surgery to correct. For constipation, try placing your turtle in warm water for thirty minutes and increase the amount of fiber in his diet. Impaction, on the other hand, can be caused by the accidental ingestion of material like rocks, sand or gravel that can’t be passed through the cloaca. If you keep any of these as a substrate, and your turtle is not eliminating on a regular basis, you should suspect an impaction and act quickly. Take your turtle to the veterinarian to be given an x-ray, and promptly remove anything from the tank that could be eaten.

**Parasites**

Usually, parasites are not a problem with captive-bred turtles, but they are often found in wild-caught. There is also a chance that if you give your red-eared slider live worms or fish to eat, he could catch something if one of these smaller prey animals was infected.

Leeches are a common problem for the aquatic turtles. They appear as small, dark worms on the body that attach at the skin of the neck or legs. They feed off of the blood of your turtle, and the best treatment is to pick them off with a pair of tweezers and wipe the affected area with an
antibiotic. Treat the turtle the same way that you would treat a minor wound.

Liver flukes are found in almost every wild-caught red-eared slider. Normally, these do no harm, but in greater numbers they can cause organ failure and kill your turtle. If your turtle experiences any symptoms of rapid weight loss and loss of appetite, he will need to see a vet straight away.

If your turtle eats regularly but still appears to be losing weight, he could have an intestinal parasite like nematodes. These worms, like most internal parasites, have a complex life cycle that is spent in the bodies of snails, fish or other worms. Usually the eggs are passed in turtle feces which are then eaten by snails, and when a turtle eats a snail, it is then infected and the process begins again. Even captive-bred turtles are susceptible, if they are given any contaminated food. To handle this problem, regularly examine the feces of your turtle and keep an eye open for any visible parasites, which will appear like moving threads. If you suspect your turtle has been infected, gather a sample of feces for examination by a vet. A dewormer is usually prescribed, which can be given through food or as oral drops.

Parasites can also attack a turtle through any open wound, so if you have been treating a turtle with any abrasions or cuts, be sure to keep a close eye open. Because parasites are unique and respond to different treatments, it's important to properly identify the problem before offering medicine.

**Cloacal Prolapse**

This should not be confused with the fanning of a male – which is the exposure and retraction of the male's penis, a behavior that is normal and is no cause for concern. A cloacal prolapse is the protrusion of the intestinal organs through the cloacal opening, usually the intestines or the ovaries in females. It's not known for certain what causes this condition, but it could be related to impaction or intestinal parasites, but that isn't always a factor. Stress is also another suspected cause.
If you have a turtle who is experiencing a prolapse, isolate him immediately into his own tank of warm, clean water and let him soak. It might help to entice him to gently move around to work the organs back into place, but never try to force them in yourself. If the tissue hasn’t gone back inside the turtle’s body after a few days, take him to the veterinarian. Normally a prolapse isn’t life-threatening, but the area must be kept clean and wet until the issue is resolved.

It’s also possible that the turtle might not realize that the tissue is a part of himself and try to dislodge it entirely. It’s also possible that if he’s not isolated, other turtles will attack the prolapsed tissue. If this happens, there’s not much alternative but to take the turtle to the veterinarian for surgery. Scratches, cuts and other wounds to the tissue can be very serious.

**Visceral Gout**

During your time caring for your turtle, you may hear about visceral gout. This is a nutritional disease that normally affects tortoises rather than turtles, and it’s caused by a diet that is too high in fat and protein, and it can be treated with a diet that consists of more vegetable matter than animal products.

Some keepers may be surprised to know that turtles, like any other creature, can and do become overweight. Your red-eared slider may taken on a swollen appearance if he is not being given a proper diet. To prevent any serious problems, it’s important to not overfeed your turtle. If you give your red-eared slider excessive amounts of protein, this can lead to various health problems such as accelerated growth, premature sexuality, pyramiding (shell disfigurements), and even organ failure.
Skin and Shell Problems

Under normal conditions, your turtle’s shell should appear hard and relatively smooth, and his skin should look clean and dark. Most problems occur due to water quality, hygiene, an improper basking area, diet or improper lighting. While these conditions are all preventable, they can still happen to even the best keepers, and they require a long time to heal properly and intensive care.

**Cracked shell:**
For these, it’s best that a veterinarian promptly examines the shell and the turtle so that he can assess whether or not internal damage has been done. Cracked shells are a very serious problem that can lead to a great deal of suffering and death. Do not delay in getting your turtle to the veterinarian.

**Red or pink coloring on the shell or skin:**
This can be an indication of septicemia, also known as blood poisoning. If your turtle has had a previous illness, injury or infection, he’s is particularly susceptible and you will need to contact the veterinarian immediately for further treatment.

**Algae:**
This is a normal condition that usually plagues any turtles that have been wild-caught or are kept in outdoor enclosures. It’s completely harmless to the turtle, although it is unattractive, and the best way to deal with it is to keep the water clean. For the turtle, you can remove the algae with a soft bristle toothbrush and some water, or you can use a damp rag to wipe it off. Do not, under any circumstances, use an...
algae to handle the algae. These chemicals usually contain hydrochloric acid which can be harmful to your pets.

**Discolored spots and fungus:**
These can appear as patches of white fluff or white spots, found over the skin or shell of the turtle. In almost all cases, poor water quality or improper basking is the culprit. These spots or patches are highly contagious and tend to spread outward across the body, so if you find your turtle is affected, isolate him immediately. You can use commercial products to treat the water and prevent this condition, and if the condition grows worse or doesn’t clear up on its own, contact your veterinarian. Mineral deposits, on the other hand, can sometimes be mistaken for an infection. These usually appear as hard, white spots across the shell and are caused by hard water and poor water quality. This is not a life threatening condition, but it should be handled.

**Pyramiding:**
This is a completely preventable condition caused by overfeeding and too much protein and fat in the diet. Improper feeding causes rapid growth of the turtle, and pyramiding occurs when the shell scutes are not smooth and have taken on a pyramid shape. Correct the diet immediately, because negligence can lead to permanent disability.

**Scute shedding:**
In time, as your turtle grows, he will shed the scales (scutes) of his shell. This is entirely normal. During this time, make sure your turtle has a proper basking area available when he needs it and keep an eye open for any infection which might occur between the old scute and the new one. Also, during this time, the scute itself should grow lighter in color, which is caused by air seeping between the old and new growth.
Beaks and Claws

Unlike many reptiles, like snakes and lizards, which shed all of their skin at once, turtles shed their skin continuously in small flakes. Therefore, they aren't prone to some of the same conditions as these animals, but many species of turtles have problems with their beaks and claws becoming overgrown. In captivity, they can't wear them down fast enough to prevent problems with biting, chewing and walking. Fortunately, red-eared sliders are not one of those varieties of turtles. You should never need to trim your red-eared sliders claws or beak. Having long nails is normal and natural, especially the male.

The Importance of Calcium

Many reptiles, turtles included, need to get ample amounts of calcium and vitamin D3 to prevent a serious condition known as Metabolic Bone Disease (MBD), also known as soft shell syndrome. Without calcium, turtles lose hardness and strength in their bones and shells. The mineral is absorbed into the body through its diet, and a lack of it in the bloodstream is known as hypocalcaemia. Without enough calcium to function, the turtle's body begins to pull the mineral from its bones, and without sufficient amounts to replenish what is taken, the skeletal structure is greatly weakened.

Young hatchlings and gravid females should receive extra amounts of calcium to compensate for the growth of their
bodies and their eggs. Early cases of MBD can be treated, but if your turtle has an advanced case, there may be nothing that can be done to reverse the damage.

Common symptoms of MBD include a softening shell, tremors and reflex problems. Your turtle may grow weak and lethargic, refusing to eat. Areas of white discoloring may appear on the shell, and rot may begin to affect your turtle.

MBD is completely preventable. Provide a good, varied diet of vegetables and pellets, and for a supplement, you can offer a cuttlebone. Avoid vegetables containing oxalic acid, like spinach, and avoid offering any treats that contain more phosphorous than calcium. Make certain your turtle is getting adequate amounts of vitamin D3, which allows it to absorb the calcium. You can provide this through metabolized UVB rays or a supplement, but direct and unobstructed sunlight is the best source.

**Zoonoses**

With proper hygiene and care, you will greatly reduce any risk of getting an illness from your turtle. Zoonoses are diseases that are able to be passed from animals to humans. The best-known disease is salmonella, also known as food poisoning, which has been known to cause nausea, cramping and diarrhea in humans. Although it’s not normally life-threatening, for smaller children or those who are elderly or frail, the threat of dehydration can be quite serious.

Proper hygiene in all cases will greatly reduce the risk of catching any illness from your turtle. Wash your hands thoroughly in hot soap and water before and after handling your red-eared slider. Wash any surfaces that your turtle comes into contact with, and avoid bringing him into places where any food is prepared. Keep the enclosure in good, clean condition. Salmonella will flourish in the water if it’s not properly filtered and changed on a regular basis.
Advice to Prevent Health Problems

When it comes to the health of your red-eared slider, prevention is the best cure for disorders and diseases. Fortunately, these are very hardy turtles which are not as susceptible to diseases as other breeds.

To make sure that your pet stays healthy, be sure to provide the correct habitat for the needs of your red-eared slider. Monitor the temperature, heating, and lighting. Provide a balanced and nutritional diet for him, which will help to avoid serious diseases like Metabolic Bone Disease or soft shell syndrome. Keep the environment clean to prevent the spread of diseases like salmonella. Following all of this should ensure that you and your pet live happy and healthy lives together.
When it comes to having pets, most people easily envision the boisterous activity of a dog or the independence of a cat. They’re animals that you can easily interact with, that enjoy attention, sometimes perform tricks and enrich our lives because they seem to enjoy being with us unconditionally. It’s not quite the same with turtles and other reptiles. Red-eared sliders don’t perform tricks. They can’t even be housebroken, and they don’t seem to even enjoy it when you touch them or pick them up, even though they may learn to grow tolerant of it.

This makes them a very different breed of pet altogether. When they sit and bask on their logs or swim through the water to munch their food, they might seem like very simple, slow creatures. It would be a mistake to believe that they’re stupid, however. Turtles have their own ways of communicating, even if it’s more subtle than what we people are used to seeing, and this chapter will help you to understand more of how your red-eared slider thinks and behaves. It will also help you to learn how to better handle your turtle so as to cause it less stress overall. Pay attention to their needs, their signals and the way their minds work, and you’ll have an easier time understanding what your turtle is saying to you.

**Handling and Holding**

Like many other turtles, red-eared sliders don’t particularly enjoy being handled more than is absolutely necessary. They don’t respond well to physical contact. It can be difficult to resist the
temptation, though. For many people, turtles don’t inspire the same level of fear that other lizards and snakes can. There’s something about their faces that many find cute, and the urge to hold, pet and play with a turtle can be hard to deny.

Although some species of aquatic turtles can become tame enough to take food from your own fingers, most will still retreat to the water and the bottom of the tank as quickly as possible at your approach. Red-eared sliders, fortunately, make wonderful pets because they can be tamed and can grow to tolerate handling and holding. Always keep an eye on your turtle’s movements. A tame and calm turtle is slow-moving and mellow. Any rapid movement or flailing is a sign of stress, meaning that you need to put down your turtle quickly and give him time to hide and calm down.

Sometimes, there’s just not much choice but to pick up your turtle. You may need to transport him to the veterinarian, or you may simply need to take him out of his enclosure to clean it, feed him or go about any other maintenance tasks. It’s important to be careful, because while a turtle is well-protected in his shell, they are still able to be injured if they’re dropped or handled incorrectly. If your turtle falls, his shell could crack or there could be potentially fatal organ damage.

When handling or holding your red-eared slider, be sure to use both hands. Because they spend so much of their time in the water, their shells are bound to be slippery. Get a good grip on him. If your turtle isn’t very tame, he may resist being picked up at all. He may vocally hiss and pull back his head for defense. He’s got sharp claws that are capable of scratching, and he may empty his bowels. As you pick him up, be sure to support him beneath his arms, legs and body. This will help him to feel a bit more secure. Turtles usually don’t leave the ground unless one of two things is happening: he falls or he’s being picked up in the jaws of a predator. Dangling in mid-air can be a very scary experience for him.
It’s also important to note that you should always, always wash your hands before and after handling your red-eared slider. Wash with soap and water before picking him up to prevent transferring any contaminants from you to him, and wash afterwards to prevent the spread of salmonella. Any areas that come into contact with your turtle, likewise, should be cleaned and sanitized before and after. Keeping things as clean as possible will go a long way towards preventing any illness.

For that matter, never allow your red-eared slider to come into contact with any area where food preparation takes place. Avoid kitchen countertops and sinks, both with the turtle and any items that have come from his enclosure. It’s also advised that you avoid using the bathroom if at all possible, and instead use water from a tap in your basement, a utility room or outside. If these aren’t feasible options, then be sure to very thoroughly clean and sanitize the bathroom once you’re finished.

**Transporting Turtles**

Occasionally, there will come a time when you have to pick up your turtle and take him on a little trip. You might have to transport him to the veterinarian, or it may be for reasons like going to show and tell at a local school, a herpetological show or an educational lecture. There are different ways of handling this, depending on whether or not you’re travelling by car or airplane.

For a very small turtle, on a very short trip, it’s possible to use a snake bag. This is a rather large size of bag, about 18 inches long and a foot wide. A pillowcase is a good improvisation for a snake bag. Place the small turtle in the bag with a handful of moist paper towels, then twist the top closed and tie it in an overhand knot for easy carrying. Just be sure that no one sits or steps on the bag!
If you’re travelling by car on a longer journey, and the turtle will be travelling with you, these are some suggestions for safety and comfort, both for you and your red-eared slider:

- Use a sturdy box, one made of cardboard or plastic, and avoid a hard-sided tank such as one made of glass. For a substrate, use shredded newspapers or a towel. Never try to transport your turtle in a tank full of water.

- Make sure you have a lid for your box to prevent escapes, drafts, any items from accidentally falling inside and to keep it dark. Don’t completely close up the box because air will need to get inside. During this time, your turtle will likely burrow and try to sleep.

- Keep the air temperature at around 70 to 80 degrees Fahrenheit and use a wire probe thermometer so you can check the temperature regularly without opening the lid or disturbing your turtle more than is necessary.

- Every couple of hours, check on the turtle to make sure he hasn’t flipped over onto his shell and clean up any waste that may be present.

If you can’t keep the vehicle’s temperature at around 75 to 80 degrees, here are some suggestions for handling different situations. If there’s no way to cool the car down with air conditioning or with wind, try the following:

- Check the thermometer in the every fifteen minutes and keep an eye on the temperature.

- Keep the box out of direct sunlight.

- Mist the turtle if you cannot cool down the air. You can also wipe him off with a cool towel. Evaporation will help to keep the temperature down.

- If you’re travelling a long distance in hot weather, consider travelling after sunset when the temperatures drop.
If the car gets too cold, dropping below 65, and you have no way to heat the vehicle, here are some suggestions:

- Check the thermometer every fifteen minutes and use a wire probe to prevent having to open the box.

- Place the box into a larger tub, either one made of plastic or of Styrofoam. Settle a hot water bottle or a heat pack, taking care to wrap them securely and protect them, and don’t allow them to come near direct contact with the turtle.

Travelling by air plane is a whole other ball game, requiring more preparation from you further in advance.

- Check with the airline before you book your tickets and make arrangements. The best policy is one that allows you to bring your turtle with you on board the air plane, inside the passenger cabin. Remember the person you talk to and make note of their name, position and any relevant phone numbers. Get verbal and printed confirmation that they’ll accept your pet on board the plane, then make sure you get a carrying case that will fit under your seat and will be accepted by the airline. Don’t forget to get all of this information for your return trip too.

- Make sure that on the day you’re travelling, you have all of the relevant paperwork and copies of it with you.

- Never, ever try to sneak your turtle onto the airline. Not only could this result in you getting into trouble with airport authorities, possibly facing fines and the confiscation of your turtle, but your turtle cannot be stored with your luggage. They could suffocate, freeze or die from the lack of a pressurized environment.

Shipping should only ever be a last resort saved for healthy turtles. When it comes to making a choice for a shipper, search for information online about who has the most experience in dealing with live reptiles.

**Leaving Your Turtle at Home Alone**
If it proves to be too much hassle to transport your turtle, another alternative is to leave him at home alone or leave him in someone else’s care. Fortunately, because their emotional needs are fewer than those of dogs or cats, it can become a matter as easy as checking the temperature, food and water, then doing some cleaning. There’s no need to walk a turtle or play with it.

If you plan to leave your turtle alone, an acceptable period of time is one or two days. If you’re going to be gone for longer, you’ll need to do some planning ahead.

When it comes to feeding your red-eared slider during the time you’re gone, this can be problematic. A healthy, strong adult can safely go several days without food, and living vegetation in the enclosure can help, though some red-eared sliders may not want to eat the plants. Having small feeder goldfish in the water will also help, if your turtle is capable of catching them. If you’ve got multiple turtles in the enclosure, this can be more problematic, as the more aggressive ones will be more adept at feeding and can end up taking all of the food. If you’ve got any small or recently-ill turtles, it’s not recommended that you leave them unattended.

For any absences that last for longer than a couple of days, you really should have someone else looking in on your turtle. Every couple of days should be sufficient for a feeding and for checking on their general health. Cleaning should be done as necessary, and all of the equipment should be checked to make sure it’s operational. You can always leave lights set on a timer, and the enclosure should be secured to prevent any escapes.

If you can’t leave the turtle at home and have someone else come in to look on him, another option is to house him somewhere else for a time. Some veterinarians will take in a turtle for a short period of time, but be sure to speak with the vet’s office and make certain that they are capable of taking care of an exotic pet. Also take the time to look at where they’ll be housing the turtle to make sure it’s suitable for his needs.
If you’re fortunate, you may be able to have someone else set up a temporary residence at their house. If that’s the case, you can set up a temporary enclosure with some basic filtration, lights, heating and basking equipment. Leave detailed instructions, an emergency veterinarian’s number and a care sheet with the person, and be sure to give them thorough instructions on feeding, checking temperatures and how to handle the turtle.

With some forethought and care, you can keep your turtle healthy and comfortable until your return.

**Intelligence and Temperament of Red-Eared Sliders**

While it’s true that the intelligence and mental capacity of a turtle can’t quite match that of a mammal, it’d be a grave injustice to call them stupid. They have their own quirks and their own ways to communicate and interact with the world, and by learning more about the behavior of your red-eared slider, you’ll come to realize he’s much, much more than a mouth or a shell.

Reptiles share some similarities with birds, but when it comes to turtles, they lack the enlarged cerebral hemispheres that birds and mammals both have. These hemispheres control learning and reasoning, meaning that turtles just don’t share the same levels of intelligence, but their brain size reaches a ratio that’s comparable to quite a few birds. Recent
studies indicate that they function at a much higher mental level than was previously believed.

The red-eared slider will always be a wild animal, and although in time it can and will learn to recognize you, it will never grow beyond its wild animal instincts. They have individual personalities and behaviors, and one of the great things about red-eared sliders is that they’re friendlier and more interactive than many other species of aquatic turtles. They can learn to take food straight from your hand, and they’re not generally aggressive. If they do bite you during a feeding, it’s more likely that they’ve mistaken your fingers food than actually wanting to attack you.

However, red-eared sliders have been known to bite when they don’t wish to be handled. Pay attention to the warning signals. If your turtle opens his mouth and hisses at you, it’s a sign that he’s uncomfortable with your presence. They also have a tendency to withdraw into their shells when frightened or feel threatened. If that’s the case, respect your turtle’s discomfort and don’t try to force interaction with him. Get your business done quickly and calmly, and then leave him alone to recover from the stress.

Red-eared sliders also have an ability, in the wild, to locate water in unfamiliar territory. In a recent study, it was shown that fifty percent of red-eared sliders relocated to a new pond four hundred meters away when their own home pond had dried up. These turtles had enough intelligence to navigate through hostile territory to reach a more suitable habitat.
Hibernation

Hibernation is a period of inactivity during the winter months when the weather gets cold and the reptile’s metabolism slows to a crawl. This survival mechanism allows turtles and other cold-blooded reptiles (technically, for a reptile, it’s called brumation instead of hibernation) to survive harsh, freezing winters in non-tropical areas.

When it comes to your red-eared slider, it is not necessary to force him to brumate. In fact, it isn’t recommended at all. If you’re keeping your turtles indoors all year round, there’s nothing that needs to be changed, and if you live somewhere with cold winters and an outdoor enclosure, you can always bring your turtles indoors when the temperatures drop.

There are several reasons why it’s dangerous to the health of your red-eared slider to allow it to hibernate:

 الاجتماعي  You may lack the experience to properly care for your turtle.

اجتماعي You may not have an adequate habitat to support your turtle’s hibernation.

اجتماعي Young or sick turtles may not be healthy enough to survive the process.

اجتماعي Your turtle isn’t prepared for it.

اجتماعي Your geographical location may not be suitable for hibernation conditions.

When a red-eared slider hibernates, he does so in the muddy, leafy layers at the bottom of a pond that is several feet deep and has a lot of surface area.
He buries himself beneath the mud, and he won’t surface again, not even to breathe. During this time, as the turtle’s metabolism slows down and he slips into a torpid state, he takes in oxygen through cloacal breathing methods. This is the method of absorbing oxygen through special membranes in the mouth, throat and cloaca.

At the lower depths of a pond, the water shouldn’t freeze, even if the upper layers do, and neither should the temperatures fluctuate too greatly. The cold temperatures cause reduced oxygen levels, so for a red-eared slider to survive, well-oxygenated water and depth are a necessity, both of which are most often not provided by artificial or pre-formed ponds.

If you do attempt to let your sliders hibernate, you absolutely must keep the water at the minimum temperatures. If the water becomes too warm, your turtle may reduce his activity and refuse to eat, never quite slipping into a state of hibernation. This means his metabolism will remain high enough for him to require food on a regular basis, but his instincts will not let him eat. He’ll eventually starve to death long before warmer spring weather tells him it’s time to eat again. This is commonly called a “death zone.” A good water temperature for an active red-eared slider is 75 to 78 degrees Fahrenheit (24 – 26 degrees Celsius).

In the wild, red-eared sliders have been found to hibernate in some strange places, including hollow logs and tree stumps. It’s unknown if they were actually hibernating or in a semi-torpid state, but these turtles are using more energy than if they were hibernating under the surface of the water. In this state, they are also far more vulnerable to predators and temperature changes, all of which make for a risky way to pass the winter months.

If you are insistent on forcing your red-eared sliders to hibernate, and if you are sure that you have the proper environment to help them survive through it, then it’s recommended that you contact a local herpetological or reptile organization and speak with more experienced keepers in your region.
Locating a Missing Red-Eared Slider

Being active and inquisitive turtles, it’s inevitable that your red-eared slider will get into some mischief. Sometimes, even the most vigilant of keepers will have accidents. Red-eared sliders can escape from their enclosures, usually in some ingenious ways that include climbing on top of their fixtures or other turtles. So when you set up the enclosure for your turtle, be sure that he cannot reach the very top, even if he does climb up onto everything in sight, and make sure that everything is well-secured.

If you do find yourself with a turtle loose in the house, here are some tips for getting him back quickly:

1) Close all of your doors, set up barriers between open rooms and secure any larger pets like cats or dogs to prevent them from finding your red-eared slider first. If you’ve already checked all the rooms in the house, then check a second time. It can be easy to overlook a small turtle.

2) Search methodically, from room to room, being sure to check in dark places like beneath the beds and behind appliances and furniture. Look in tight areas and try to clear the floor area as best you can by stacking your belongings on chairs and tables.

3) Listen for any movement. If you have a hard wood floor, you may be able to hear your turtle’s nails and shell scratching along it when he moves, or he may be trying to dig his way out if he’s trapped in a tight place, like between a dresser and a wall. This is also a useful method if you have only lost him a short time ago and you know he’s in the general area.
4) Under ideal conditions, your turtle could survive a week or two, but if he was injured falling from any height, like from on top of a staircase, he may not have that long. Leave out a bowl of shallow water for him just in case, and try leaving a smelly food out as bait, like a can of tuna.

5) Don’t underestimate your turtle’s ability to hide, no matter his size. Don’t give up on searching until you find him, and expect him to be more active during the day and sleeping at night.

If your turtle was kept outdoors in an enclosure, he can still escape. While you should have fencing or another type of barrier to prevent escapes, a red-eared slider might still be able to dig under it or scale a fence. Even with supervision, a turtle roaming around the yard can have a tendency to just disappear, due to their ability to blend in with their surroundings or bury themselves into soft mud. If you find your turtle has escaped his outdoor enclosure, try the following to locate him again:

1) Set up additional barriers if you can and restrain any larger pets. A red-eared slider may explore at random, so be sure to check under bushes, decks, outdoor furniture, leaves and rocks. Check along all of the perimeters.

2) Because of their coloring, red-eared sliders can be easy to overlook, so be sure to check in tight places, both horizontal and vertical.

3) Listen and look for movement, especially swaying grass or rustling shrubs.

4) Under ideal conditions, your turtle can survive a week or two, but he may be injured or have restricted movement. Leave out water and
food for him that he can easily smell, but be aware that it may not be your turtle who consumes the food.

5) Don’t give up the search. Turtles can move very quickly, more quickly than the average person might suspect. Expect them to move more during the day than at night.

6) Ask the neighbors, especially any children in the area, if they’ve seen your turtle. If your neighbors have ponds set up, be sure to check in those areas too.

Once you do have your turtle back, you’ll need to immediately check him over for any injuries. Look for any cracks in his shell, any abrasions, bleeding or wounds. If you find any bleeding through the shell or areas of sensitivity that could be broken bones, you’ll need to take your turtle to the vet straightaway.

If he appears to be well, give him a soak in clean water to wash off any dust and dirt. For turtles which have been missing a few days, there may be a dehydration issue. You can give it a soak in warmed Pedialyte, which is an electrolyte solution often given to young children, or use a mix of 50% Gatorade and 50% water. Make sure it’s at a temperature of 75 to 80 degrees Fahrenheit. Do not overfeed your turtle in order to try and compensate for missed days. Go back to his regular feeding schedule.
Additional References (Bonus):

1. Red-Eared Sliders - 20 Frequently Asked Questions

2. 10 Common Mistakes You Should Avoid With Red-Eared Sliders

3. The History Of Turtles
CONCLUSIONS

Red-Eared Sliders Are Among
The Most Recognizable Creatures On Earth!

If it is taken care properly,
you'll find out how amazing this little reptile.

I truly enjoy the time I spend with my red eared sliders,
I hope you too.
Appreciation

Thank you very much for spending your time reading this book, I hope you have learnt a lot about how to take care of your red eared slider in the right ways!

Wishing you and your red eared slider a meaningful relationship.

Best Regards;
Chris Johnson
Written By
- Chris Johnson -

Red Eared Slider Secrets