

WILD RED-EARED SLIDER TURTLES

Trachemys scripta elegans

Management programme

Exclusion	Eradication	Progressive containment	Sustained control	Site-led (Wetlands)
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Impacts

Economic	Biodiversity	Soil resources	Water quantity/quality
Human health	Social and cultural wellbeing	Amenity/recreation	Animal welfare

Objectives

Provide advice and information on red-eared sliders and reduce their impacts in wetlands within the Waikato region.

Why are they a pest?

The Invasive Species Specialist Group has listed the red-eared slider turtle as one of the world's 100 worst invasive species. It is a medium sized freshwater turtle native to southern parts of the United States. Red-eared slider turtles are readily available in New Zealand, sold through the pet trade as juveniles around 50mm long. Red-eared slider turtles are omnivorous, long lived and tolerate a range of environmental conditions.

The impact of red-eared slider turtles in the wild in New Zealand is largely unknown but, given their omnivorous diet, they could adversely impact aquatic plants, insects, eels, small fish species and ground-nesting birds. They can survive in the wild in a wide range of aquatic habitats, including manmade drains and canals, natural wetlands, rivers, lakes, ponds and brackish estuarine waters.

Overseas, wild populations have become established predominantly by people releasing pet turtles when they outgrow their tanks and outlive their appeal. Likewise, there is potential for them to become a serious problem here. Serious consideration should be undertaken before purchasing such a long-lived animal as a pet.



Red-eared slider turtles can survive in the wild in the Waikato and there are a number of areas that have proven suitable for their reproduction. Climate change could increase the number of places that are suitable for them to breed.

Photo: X-ray of a female turtle caught at Cooks Beach carrying eggs.

Responsibility for control

Waikato Regional Council may undertake direct control of red-eared slider turtles in wetlands in the Waikato region.

- No one is allowed to propagate, release, or spread red-eared sliders within wetlands in the Waikato region (rule WET-1 of the *Waikato Regional Pest Management Plan 2022-2032*).
- Occupiers in the Waikato are encouraged to report any sightings of red-eared turtles within wetlands to the council (rule WET-2 of the *RPMP 2022-2032*).

What do they look like?



Red-eared sliders are semi-aquatic turtles.

- Shell can grow up to 350mm long.
- Some individuals have been known to reach more than 400mm, but average length ranges from 120mm to 200mm.
- Females are usually a little larger than the males.
- Shell and skin are usually leaf green in young turtles, turning olive to brown in mature turtles.
- Head, legs, tail are green with fine yellow irregular lines.

More information

For advice and additional information on red-eared slider turtles, call our animal pest staff on freephone 0800 800 401.

Web

- Waikato Regional Pest Management Plan 2022-2032 – waikatoregion.govt.nz/RPMP