

Yellow-bellied Slider Turtle

Trachemys scripta

The yellow-bellied slider is a conspicuous turtle that is often seen basking on logs in ponds or lakes. In fact, sliders can be found in just about any permanent body of water in the Southeast. Sliders are large turtles reaching 10 inches in length; females get quite a bit bigger than males. Adult turtles feed on aquatic weeds, insects, and carrion.



Slider turtles, like many species of reptiles in the Southeast, have breeding seasons in the fall and spring. During the breeding season, a male turtle will swim up to face a female and wave his long fingernails in front of her. By caressing the female's chin or creating water currents around her head, he may entice her to mate. Several weeks after mating, a female digs a hole with her hind feet and deposits 6 to 10 eggs in it. The eggs incubate for 2 - 3 months and the young often stay in the nest over the winter, emerging the next spring.



These hatchling turtles are not much bigger than a quarter when they come out of the ground. Many predators like to feed on young "yellow bellies," so the hatchlings hide in weedy areas to avoid detection. The baby turtles eat insects and other aquatic invertebrates, switching to plants as they get older. Slider turtles grow slowly and may not reach adult size until their 8th or 9th year.

Savannah River Ecology Lab researcher, Whit Gibbons, has studied freshwater turtles for more than three decades and has marked and measured over 10,000 yellow-bellied sliders. He has found that this species lives for over 30 years in the wild. He is interested in the role sliders and other reptiles play in wetland habitats of the southeastern ecosystem.

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Photos by David Scott