

Terrapins

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Species Description

Scientific name: *Trachemys scripta* spp.

AKA: Sliders

Native to: North America

Habitat: Prefers still or slow-flowing water. Commonly found in urban parks.

Red eared sliders (*Trachemys scripta elegans*) are dark green and have some yellow colouring, its most prominent feature is the distinctive red stripe behind the eye. They can grow to 30 cm in length.

Yellow-bellied sliders (*Trachemys scripta scripta*) are usually dark brown and have prominent yellow stripes on the side of the head and neck. They can also grow to 30 cm in length.

Cumberland sliders (*Trachemys scripta troostii*) have a distinctive green shell with yellow and black spots, they can grow up to 21 cm in length.

Trachemys scripta spp. are present in Northern Ireland. A large number were imported in the mid-1980s for the pet trade, subsequent releases and escapes and also due to a long life span (30 years) they have since become established in the wild. Breeding in Northern Ireland is considered unlikely.

They are opportunistic omnivores and predate on invertebrates, fish and amphibians. They often use the banks of water bodies to bask, which can disturb the nests of waterfowl such as Moorhens and thus interfere with breeding.

Under the Invasive Alien Species (Enforcement and Permitting) Order (Northern Ireland) 2019 it is offence to intentionally keep; breed; transport to, from or within Northern Ireland, use or exchange *Trachemys scripta* spp.; or to release it into the environment.



Red eared terrapin (*Trachemys scripta elegans*)

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Key ID Features



Cumberland terrapin (*Trachemys scripta troostii*)

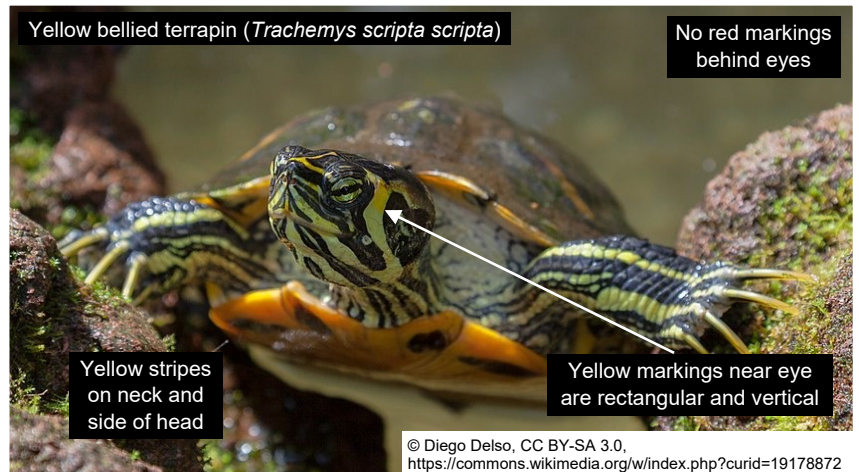
Horizontal lines of yellow and black on rear of thighs

Hollow black spots on underside plates

Green shell with yellow and black spots



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Yellow bellied terrapin (*Trachemys scripta scripta*)

No red markings behind eyes

Yellow stripes on neck and side of head

Yellow markings near eye are rectangular and vertical

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Red eared terrapin (*Trachemys scripta elegans*)

Distinctive red markings behind eyes

Dark olive green to brown

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Report any sightings via; CEDaR Online Recording - <https://www2.habitas.org.uk/records/ISI>, iRecord app or Invasive Species Northern Ireland website - <http://invasivespeciesni.co.uk/report-sighting>

Identification throughout the year

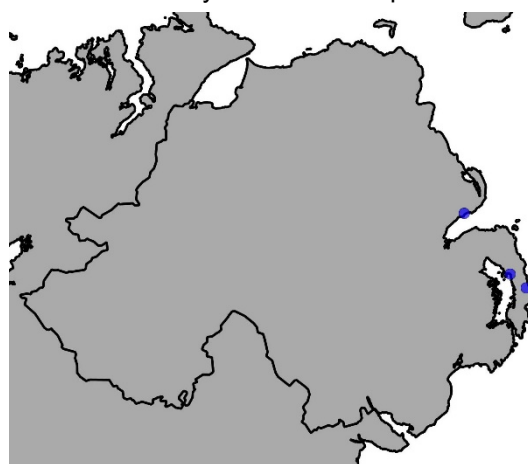
Active April – October and can be seen basking on banks, logs or boulders within or close to a water body. They are easily disturbed and will quickly return to the water, so are best observed using binoculars. Juveniles have similar features to adults.



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Distribution

Few records across Northern Ireland but numbers are likely to be under-reported.



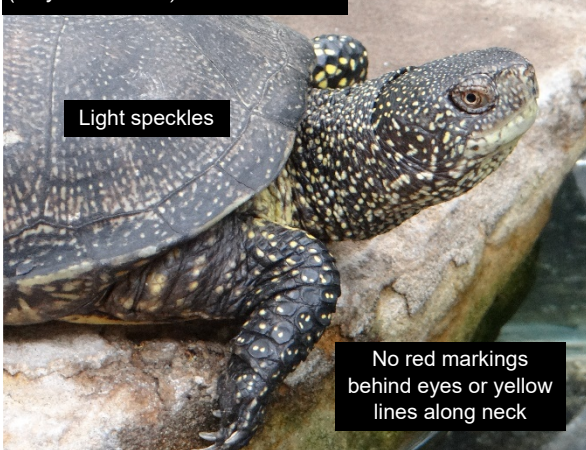
Source: NBN Atlas Northern Ireland
<https://northernireland-species.nbnatlas.org/search/?q=trachemys>
Check website for current distribution

Similar Species

There are no native terrapins, tortoises or freshwater turtles in Northern Ireland, although other invasive non-native species have been released or escaped from captivity.

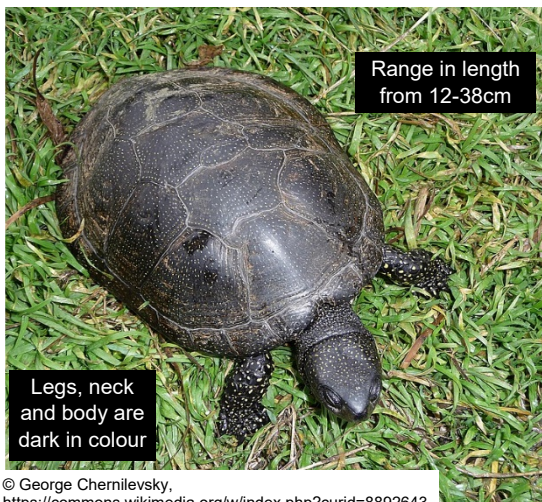
European pond terrapin

Invasive non-native
(*Emys orbicularis*)



Light speckles

No red markings
behind eyes or yellow
lines along neck



Range in length
from 12-38cm

Legs, neck
and body are
dark in colour

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Common snapping turtle

Invasive non-native
(*Chelydra serpentina*)



Saw-edged
crest on
upper side of
long tail

At 25-47 cm in length, can
grow much larger than
Trachemys scripta spp.

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Large head with
hooked jaws

© USFWSmidwest - Snapping Turtle,
<https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=69205193>

References and further reading:

Booy O., Wade M. and Roy H. 2015. Field Guide to Invasive Plants and Animals in Britain. Bloomsbury. London.

CABI datasheet - *Trachemys scripta elegans* (red-eared slider) available <https://www.cabi.org/isc/datasheet/61560>

Sustainability at the heart of a living, working, active landscape valued by everyone.