



# First Record of the Exotic Red-eared Slider, *Trachemys scripta elegans* (Wied 1838) (Emydidae) from Assam, India

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Globally, turtles are represented by 353 currently recognized species (Uetz et al. 2020) and are one of the most threatened groups of vertebrates (Turtle Conservation Coalition 2018). India is home to 29 species of tortoises and freshwater turtles, 80% (23 species) of which are threatened with extinction (Purkayastha et al. 2015; Mongabay 2019). More species (20) have been recorded from Assam than any other Indian state (Purkayastha 2013; Nath et al. 2018).

Red-eared Sliders (*Trachemys scripta elegans*), which are native to the southeastern United States and Mexico (Ernst et al. 1994), are among the most frequently traded reptiles. Due to their small size, easy maintenance, and relatively low cost (Teillac-Deschamps et al. 2008), they have become very popular pets. However, as they grow (to 30 cm carapace length), they become difficult to maintain in tanks and often are released into the wild by owners totally oblivious to the effects on native ecosystems (Teillac-Deschamps et al. 2008). In India, *Trachemys scripta elegans* has been recorded from West Bengal (Choudhuri et al. 2018), Goa (Jadav et al. 2018), Gujarat (Vyas 2019), Maharashtra, Karnataka, Hyderabad, and Chandigarh (see Vyas 2019).

Herein we report the first records of Red-eared Sliders (Fig. 1) from Assam. During surveys on the turtles of the state, we encountered two individuals, both from Guwahati City. On 17 August 2018, we found one individual in the Deeporbeel Wildlife Sanctuary (26.117694°N, 91.649353°E) and on 12 June 2019, we found another in the Ugratara Temple Pond (26.189000°N, 91.754215°E).

Assam, with a human population exceeding 31 million, is the most populous state in northeastern India and is becoming increasingly developed. These factors impose an ever-increasing pressure on the biodiversity of the state, primarily due to habitat alteration and degradation. Given the present scenario, the introduction of an exotic species can rapidly exacerbate the existing problems. For example, since the Yellow-bellied Gecko (*Hemidactylus flaviviridis*) was introduced in Guwahati, likely arriving via the interstate



**Fig. 1.** A young Red-eared Slider (*Trachemys scripta elegans*) from the Ugratara Temple Pond at Guwahati, Assam, India. Photograph by Jayaditya Purkayastha.

transportation system, it has completely eliminated the local gecko from the habitat into which the invasive species has expanded. In India, strict laws dealing with exotic species are urgently needed for the conservation of native species.

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