

Report of red-eared slider turtle (*Trachemys scripta elegans*) from a wetland near Kolkata, West Bengal, India

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The natural distribution range of the red-eared slider turtle, *Trachemys scripta elegans* (Wied-Neuwied, 1839), includes south-eastern USA and north-eastern Mexico (Van Dijk et al., 2012). Historical records date back to early 1950s when the species was reported to be introduced by the pet trade into Ontario, Canada (Lamond, 1994). It rapidly became a commonly sold turtle all over the world. Over 52 million *T. scripta elegans* were exported by the pet trade from USA to foreign pet trade markets during 1989-1997 (Telecky, 2001) and more than 23 million during 1998-2002 (Schlaepfer et al., 2005). France alone imported 4,238,809 young turtles between 1985 and 1994, with a maximum of 1,878,809 in 1989-1990 (Warwick, 1991). Owners unable to house them when they reach large size simply released them. This practice has been noted in Europe (Warwick, 1991), Africa (Newberry, 1984), Asia (De Silva & Blasco, 1995; Moll, 1995; Warwick, 1991) and Australia (Ramsay et al., 2007). In 2013, a shipment of as many as 10,000 hatchlings of *T. scripta elegans* was seized at the Kolkata International Airport, West Bengal, India by the Customs department which was being smuggled into India (Mukherjee, 2013), highlighting the magnitude of *T. scripta elegans* being brought into India. Here we report on *T. scripta elegans* from a water body in the Rajarhat wetlands of Kolkata, India.

The Rajarhat wetlands (22°60'32" N, 88°47'38" E, WGS 84, elev. 1 m) is situated in North 24 Parganas district, West Bengal, India. On 19 August, 2015, ca. 07:45 h, an adult *T. scripta elegans*, (Fig. 1), of about 10 inch in total length, was observed basking on a mound of floating dead vegetation in a water body at Rajarhat wetlands. When approached it retreated quickly into water. This is the first photographic evidence of the species having been introduced into the water bodies of West Bengal, India. It is likely to be an abandoned pet rather than an escapee.

Trachemys scripta elegans has already been reported from Gomati Talab, Gujarat (Vyas, 2015) and Goa, India (Jadhav et al., 2018). Pupins (2007) mentions its introduction in India but gives no details of localities. Also in the Rajarhat wetlands the present authors have recorded the Indian flapshell turtle (*Lissemys punctata andersoni*), a species that throughout most of its range is under threat from habitat loss, and human consumption of both eggs and



Figure 1. Red-eared slider turtle (*T. s. elegans*) photographed while basking in the Rajarhat Wetlands, Kolkata, West Bengal, India. The specimen appears to be seriously injured with a deep crack in the carapace and the rear left leg oddly distended.

meat (Purkayastha et al., 2015). A further potential threat is that *T. scripta elegans* may compete with it for food, basking sites or breeding habitats as it apparently does with the European pond turtle, *Emys orbicularis* (Cadi & Joly, 2003; Cadi & Joly, 2004; Polo-Cavia et al., 2008). Other than being a threat to native turtle species, introduced *T. scripta elegans* are also known to affect the native aquatic vegetation, arthropods and molluscs (Prévot-Julliard et al., 2007; Teillac-Deschamps et al., 2009) and transmit diseases (Hidalgo-Vila et al., 2008). We suggest that the Department of Forest, Government of West Bengal should initiate a survey in the Rajarhat wetlands to establish whether action to eliminate slider turtles is needed and if so whether it is practical.

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