

## The Florida Red-bellied Cooter *Pseudemys nelsoni*

Cooters are basking turtles and spend much of the day lying in the sun on logs or floating mats of vegetation. They will slide into the water at the least sign of danger. Red-bellied cooters can be found in rivers, streams, lakes, ponds, ditches, sloughs, marshes and mangrove bordered creeks. This species especially prefer waters with a lot of vegetation.



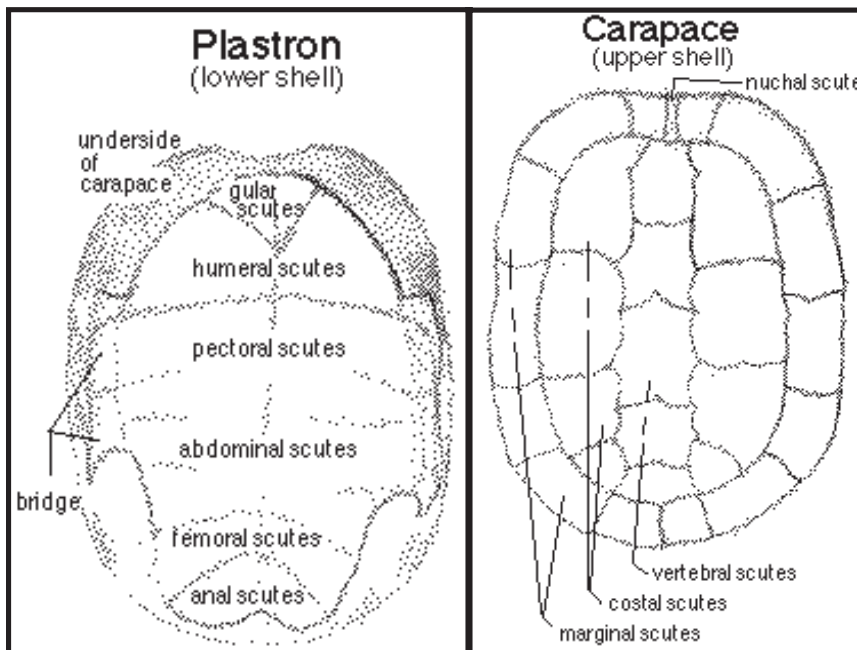
Red-bellier cooter

**Appearance:** The shell is separated into an upper section, the **carapace**, joined at the sides to a lower section, the **plastron**. Sliders have a distinctive reddish appearance, with the **plastron** tinted a reddish, orange or coral color. The carapace is usually blackish, with red or yellow markings on the **costals** and **marginals**. Males have slightly elongated, slightly curved foreclaws, and long thick tails. Females are slightly larger than males.

**Size:** Red-bellied cooters are large turtles growing to 20 to 34 centimeters (8 to 15 inches).

**Food and Feeding:** The adults are mostly herbivorous, but will also eat carrion, such as dead fish.

**Range:** Red-bellied cooters are found in most areas of Florida, specifically Florida peninsula to Apalachicola region in the panhandle. The distribution may or may not be continuous between the Apalachicola and the Peninsula; there could be a gap west of the Suwanee. It also occurs on Cumberland Island, Ga.



For more information on reptiles and amphibians try an Internet key word search on the the following organizations:

USGS Florida Caribbean Science Center  
Herpetology

Florida Museum of Natural History -  
Herpetology

Amphibian Research and Monitoring  
Initiative

Society for the Study of Amphibians and  
Reptiles