RICHARDSON TESTIMONY: HB5354

RE: Red-eared sliders (*Trachemys scripta*)

I am presenting this statement and evidence in support of HB5354.

The importation and sale of red-eared slider turtles (*Trachemys scripta*) is strongly discouraged as it has been determined that this turtle species may have deleterious invasive impacts, especially in view of the fact that this turtle achieves a reproductive age earlier than many species of turtles, exhibit higher fecundity than many other species, and grows larger than many other species. Previous scientific studies have documented that in some instances red-eared sliders will occupy better basking sites than native species, causing certain native species shift to less-desirable sites and that red-eared sliders compete with native species for food. The main native basking turtle that occurs in Connecticut is the painted turtle, *Chrysemys picta*. It is my concern and that of other scientists that introduction of red-eared sliders into ponds containing our painted turtles, may be injurious to our native sliders, especially since both are basking turtles. Also of particular concern is the possible injurious effect that red-eared sliders might have on less common native turtles such as stinkpot turtles, *Sternotherus odoratus*, and the endangered spotted turtle *Clemmys guttata*.

Although the actual impact of introduced red-eared sliders has only begun to be well documented and the ultimate threat that it poses to native species is unknown, it is prudent to minimize the risk of further introduction of this turtle into Connecticut waters.

The primary problem is with the pet trade. When people purchase these cute little turtles they are not prepared for the large, dirty animal that they may grow into attaining shell lengths of up to 12 inches and living up to 50 years in captivity. Thus, these turtles often end up being released into local ponds or lakes, especially in urban areas. I and colleagues have already observed apparent relatively high densities of red-eared sliders in Connecticut.

In view of this information, one can see that red-eared sliders could pose a problem, even if they did not reproduce in Connecticut because released turtles can live in the wild for decades. However, it has been clearly demonstrated that red-eared sliders do indeed reproduce in Connecticut. In Bridgeport, juvenile red-eared sliders or eggs have been observed, and in 2005 a freshly killed hatchling red-eared slider was found in the parking lot of the Beardsley zoo. The individual had an egg-tooth and umbilicus confirming that it was recently hatched.


In view of this data, I strongly encourage you to enact legislation banning the importation or possession of red-eared sliders (*Trachemys scripta*) into Connecticut.

Snapping turtles: Should be regulated as any other wildlife species. The primary concern that I have with the current state regulation (26-66-14) is that while a trapping endorsement is required, there are no reporting requirements and no fees. In my opinion, if snapping turtles are permitted to be sold, a special permit should be required as for any other commercially "traded" wildlife. Further, in my opinion, our wildlife (belonging to the people of Connecticut) should not be permitted to be bought or
sold. I have no issue with persons harvesting snapping turtles as outlined under the current regulations for personal consumption. I would argue however, that in addition to the trapping endorsement that is required, there should be a reporting mandate revealing the number, date, and location of snapping turtles harvested. This would permit monitoring the harvest so that we can assure that the turtle population is regulated in a sustainable fashion.
New Distribution Records for Amphibians and Reptiles in Connecticut, with Notes on the Status of an Introduced Species

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New Distribution Records for Amphibians and Reptiles in Connecticut, with Notes on the Status of an Introduced Species

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ABSTRACT
Recent field work and a review of catalogued specimens in the herpetology collections at the Yale Peabody Museum has yielded 170 new town records for amphibians and reptiles in Connecticut. These are reported here, along with observations on the status of the red-ear slider (Trachemys scripta) in Connecticut.

KEYWORDS
Trachemys scripta, red-eared slider, historical records, biodiversity surveys.

Introduction

The herpetofauna of Connecticut has been the subject of many natural history studies, beginning with Linsley (1844). During the 20th century works were published by Babbitt (1932, 1937), Lamson (1935), Petersen and Fritsch (1986) and Klemens (1993). In Klemens' landmark publication, all 22 species of amphibians and 23 species of reptiles (exclusive of marine turtles) naturally occurring in the state are treated, with the known distributions within the state presented by town, including both current and historic town records. Klemens' (1993) publication sparked considerable additional investigations, and here we present 170 new town records for 36 species of Connecticut reptiles and amphibians. These additions are derived from several principal sources. Notably, work on previously uncatalogued, historic herpetological specimens at the Peabody Museum of Natural History at Yale University (YPM) has resulted in the discovery of Connecticut specimens that were not available to Klemens and were thus not included in his publication. This material, collected mostly by S. C. Ball and M. B. Bishop in the 1930s, but also with A. E. Verrill's specimens from the 1860s and 1870s, accounts for 29 of the new town records. In addition, specimens apparently overlooked by Klemens (1993) in the Yale Peabody Museum osteology collection are included. Of particular interest are specimens deposited by E. Wayne Van Devender and co-workers in the 1960s, which account for another 14 town records presented here.

Most new town records have been accumulated in recent years, mostly from an increase in herpetofaunal surveys conducted by Yale Peabody Museum staff. Areas surveyed include properties owned by the Connecticut Audubon Society and the Nature Conservancy, along with other Connecticut nature preserves used in biodiversity surveys. Other significant contributions to our
Figure 1. Distribution of amphibians and reptiles in Connecticut, by town. Legend: Light gray, no published records; dark gray, records published in Klemens (1993); black, new records published herein.
knowledge of the distribution patterns in the Connecticut herpetofauna have come from surveys conducted as part of the ongoing Connecticut Amphibian Monitoring Project (CAMP), which began in 1998. During the first five years of this proposed 15-year study, volunteers and professional staff surveyed the amphibian populations in wetlands of 13 randomly selected study sites located throughout the state. Voucher specimens from these study sites are deposited in the YPM herpetology collection. Lastly, there are noteworthy records from each of the recent annual “BioBlitz” events, 24-hour biodiversity surveys of Connecticut urban parks sponsored by the Connecticut State Museum of Natural History. These thorough surveys of often-neglected, semi-natural urban areas have occasionally revealed surprising discoveries.

Materials and Methods

All records presented here, whether contemporary or historic, are represented by voucher specimens in the YPM herpetology collection, except for recent records of *Terrapene carolina*, for which only photographic vouchers exist. Other photographs of Connecticut amphibians and reptiles mentioned here are incorporated in the Yale Peabody Museum slide and digital image collections. Photographs within the herpetology media collection are cited by their YPM.M number.

Voucher specimens were collected under Scientific Collection Permits 0104003 and 0106019 issued by the State of Connecticut Department of Environmental Protection and Yale University IACUC protocol 2002-10681. Full locality data for species considered to be threatened, endangered or of special concern by the Connecticut Department of Environmental Protection have been submitted to the State of Connecticut Environmental and Geographic Information Center for inclusion in their Natural Resource Database.

Distribution Records

**AMPHIBIA: CAUDATA**

*Ambystoma cf. jeffersonianum* (Green)

**Figure 1A**

Town records, Canaan (Litchfield Co.); Sand Road Quarry, YPM 7832, collector Twan A. Leenders, 20 April 2003, eggs and early embryos, identification based on egg mass (see Klemens 1993), egg mass maintained in 10% buffered formalin.

*Ambystoma maculatum* (Shaw)

**Figure 1B**


*Ambystoma opacum* (Gravenhorst)

**Figure 1C**

Town records, Bethany (New Haven Co.); Bethany Bog, YPM 5977, collector R. Wayne Van Devender, 1 October 1967, cleared and stained. Danbury (Fairfield Co.); YPM 8910, collector Victor O. DeMasi, 28 March 1999, larvae with four well-developed limbs (n=2). East Haddam (Middlesex Co.); North Plain, YPM 11, collector Stanley C. Ball, 1933; also from East Haddam: YPM 4523–4524 (juveniles) and YPM 8010–8289 (larvae), all collected in 1933. East Hampton (Middlesex Co.); CAMP site, YPM 8179, collector Bryan Goff, 11 May 2003; also from East Hampton: YPM 1050, licks collection date but predates YPM 8179. Lyme (New London Co.); CAMP site, YPM 7214, collector Edward Natoli, 6 October 2002; also from Lyme: YPM 7215 (larva) and 7216 (adult); all collected in 2002.

North Haven (New Haven Co.); YPM 6208, collectors R. Wayne Van Devender and Don Allen, 23 June 1968, osteology specimens. Norwich (New London Co.); BioBlitz site, Mohagen Park, YPM 6708, collector Gregory J. Watkins-Colwell, 1 June 2002; larva; additional specimens include: YPM 6709–6711 (larvae) and YPM 6723 (adult), all collected in 2002. Orange (New Haven Co.); YPM 25, collector H. B. Coffin.

*Desmognathus fuscus* (Rafinesque)

**Figure 1D**

Figure 2. Distribution of amphibians and reptiles in Connecticut, by town. Legend: Light gray, no published records; dark gray, records published in Klemens (1993); black, new records published herein.
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_Eurycea bislineata* (Green)  
**Figure 1E**


_Hemidactylium scutatum* (Terminck and Schlegel)  
**Figure 1F**


_Plethodon cinereus* (Green)  
**Figure 1G**

_Town records._ Easton (Fairfield Co.): CAMP site, YPM 8726, collector Daniel J. Drew, 27 May 2003. Seymour (New Haven Co.): CAMP site, YPM 8195, collector Donna Lindgren, 3 May 2003; also from Seymour: YPM 8196, 9514, 9897, 9900, 9898 and 9939. Stratford (Fairfield Co.): YPM 8226, collectors Gregory J. Watkins-Colwell, Alexander Colwell and Abigail Colwell, 18 June 2003; adult; also from Stratford: YPM 9498.

_Notophthalmus viridescens* (Rafinesque)  
**Figure 1H**


_Amphibia: Anura_  

_Bufo americanus* Holbrook  
**Figure 2A**

_Town records._ Bethany (New Haven Co.): YPM 9769, collector Susan B. Hochgraf, 2 May 2004, larval (n=23); also from
Figure 3. Distribution of amphibians and reptiles in Connecticut, by town. Legend: Light gray, no published records; dark gray, records published in Klemens (1993); black, new records published herein.


**Bufo Fowleri** Garman

**Figure 2B**


**Hyla Versicolor** LeConte

**Figure 2C**


**Pseudacris Crucifer**

(Wied-Neuwied)

**Figure 2D**

Figure 4. Distribution of amphibians and reptiles in Connecticut, by town. Legend: Light gray, no published records; dark gray, records published in Klemens (1993); black, new records published herein.
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Rana clamitans Rafinesque
Figure 2F


Rana palustris LeConte
Figure 2G


Rana pipiens Schreber
Figure 2H

Town records, East Haven (New Haven Co.): YPM 4284, collector Marshall B. Bishop, 7 July 1938.

Rana sylvatica LeConte
Figure 3A


Scaphiopus holbrooki (Harlan)
Figure 3B

Town records, East Haddam (Middlesex Co.): North Plain, YPM 7926, collector Stanley C. Ball, 1 May 1934; additional specimens from North Plain: YPM 7632–7636, 7725, 7880–7889, 7910 –7918, 7920–7921, 7923–7925, 8304, 8445–8455; all larvae or metamorphs. Ball (1936) described his work with this species, including the release of thousands of larvae into a pond on his property in North Plain. Clemens (1993) discussed Ball's various localities, but did not mention the North Plain site. Additional surveys have not yet been done on this site, though its location has been confirmed. Future surveys of this area are necessary to determine whether or not this introduction was successful.

Reptilia: Testudinata

Chelydra serpentina (Linnaeus)
Figure 3C

**Sternotherus odoratus** (Latreille)

*Figure 3D*

Town records, **New Haven** (New Haven Co.): YPM 10887, collector Georg Baur, osteological specimen in the Yale Peabody Museum collection by 1890, based on accession records.

**Chrysemys picta** (Schneider)

*Figure 3E*

Town records, **Fairfield** (Fairfield Co.): Connecticut Audubon Center, YPM 11452, collector Gregory J. Watkins-Colwell, 14 August 2001, juvenile. **Norwich** (New London Co.): BioBlitz site, Mohegan Park, YPM 12554, collectors Gregory J. Watkins-Colwell and Daniel J. Drew, 22 May 2002; also collected from **Norwich**: YPM 12555, collected in 2002. **Oxford** (New Haven Co.): YPM 10546, collector Oscar Harger; no date, but Harger collected herpetological specimens for the Yale Peabody Museum mainly in the 1870s; additional specimens from Oxford: YPM 10553–10554, all osteology specimens.

**Clemmys guttata** (Schneider)

*Figure 3F*

Town records, **Monroe** (Fairfield Co.): YPM 13873, collector Kim Redmond, 8 September 2003, specimen kept alive at...
Beardsley Zoo until 9 December 2004. New Haven (New Haven Co.): YPM 10924, collector J.W. Scollick; also from New Haven: YPM 10934 (Scollick supplied the Yale Peabody Museum with 15 turtle skeletons, which arrived on 7 August 1889). Stratford (Fairfield Co.): YPM 13642, collector Gregory J. Watkins-Colwell, 29 July 2004; also from Stratford: YPM 13643: specimens are eggs shells from field-collected eggs hatched in captivity; photographs of hatchlings are deposited in the herpetology media collection as YPM.M 1104–1113, 1116–1133 (hatchlings were released at collection site). West Haven (New Haven Co.): YPM 10908, collectors Georg Baur and Charles E. Beecher, osteology specimen; no date, but Beecher and Baur were both on staff at the Yale Peabody Museum for only a short time together, during 1888–1889 (Baur left the Peabody Museum in 1890).

Clemmys inculpta (LeConte)
Figure 3G


Malaclemys terrapin (Latreille)
Figure 3H


Terrapene carolina (Linnaeus)
Figure 4A

**Trachemys scripta** (Schoepf)
*Figure 4B*


**Reptilia: Squamata**

**Carphophis amoenus** (Say)
*Figure 4C*

**Town records,** *Fairfield* (Fairfield Co.); YPM 12718, collector Shane M. Scholtz, 1 August 2002, osteology specimens and tissues.

**Diadophis punctatus** (Merrem)
*Figure 4D*


**Elaphe obsoleta** (Say)
*Figure 4E*

**Town records,** *Middlefield* (Middlesex Co.); YPM 165, collector Wesley R. Coc, 7 August 1931; also from *Middlefield* YPM 164, collected in 1936. *New Haven* (New Haven Co.); YPM 10605; also from *New Haven* YPM 10606; both are osteology specimens and were received at Yale University on 10 June 1874 from T. G. Evans, *Southbury* (New Haven Co.); YPM 163, collector Craig La Vin, 11 September 1932.

**Heterodon platirhinos** Latreille
*Figure 4F*

**Town records,** *Milford* (New Haven Co.); YPM 361, collector John Eglotoski, 1 August 1937. *Orange* (New Haven Co.); Malby Lane, YPM 86, collector C. T. Nettville, 14 April 1968. *Trumbull* (Fairfield Co.); Park Street, brought to the Beardsley Zoological Garden alive on 15 August 2003 and donated to the zoo by Steven Werner; photographed by Tawn A. Leenders on 2 October 2003 (YPM M 1101); specimen kept live at Beardsley Zoological Garden for several months, and on death deposited at the Yale Peabody Museum as YPM 13421.

**Lampropeltis triangulum** (Lacepede)
*Figure 4G*

**Town records,** *Fairfield* (Fairfield Co.); YPM 12884, collector Shane M. Scholtz, 27 May 1998. *Stratford* (Fairfield Co.); YPM 13969, at intersection of James Farm Road and North Posture Lane, collector Gregory J. Watkins-Colwell, 6 June 2005, adult.

**Nerodia sipedon** (Linnaeus)
*Figure 4H*


**Ophiodryas vernalis** (Harlan)
*Figure 5A*

**Town records,** *New Milford* (Litchfield Co.); YPM M.1138, Gaylordville, private property on Kent Road, photographed by George Sterry, 9 August 2005; series of four photographs.

**Storeria dekayi** (Holbrook)
*Figure 5B*

**Town records,** *Hamden* (New Haven Co.); YPM 14639, collector Jacques A. Gauthier, 13 August 2003 adult. *North Branford* (New Haven Co.); Northford, YPM 305, collector A. I. Rogers, 1932; also from *North Branford* YPM 365, 5994–5996 and 1442.

**Thamnophis sauritus** (Linnaeus)
*Figure 5C*

**Town records,** *Derby* (New Haven Co.); YPM 516, collector unknown, but likely Stanley C. Ball or one of his assistants, 29 April 1936. *Guilford* (New Haven Co.); YPM 11576, collector R. Wayne Van Devender, 18 June 1968, osteology specimen of an adult male. *Meriden* (New Haven Co.); YPM 547, collector George H. Powell, 23 August 1943.

**Thamnophis sirtalis** (Linnaeus)
*Figure 5D*

Agristodon contortrix (Linnaeus)

Figure 5E

Town records. West Haven (New Haven Co.); YPM 453, collected in 1932.

Discussion

The fact that even after the year 2000 more than 100 new town records could be added to the geographic distribution records of Connecticut amphibians and reptiles, the majority from the southwestern part of the state alone, is indicative of our incomplete knowledge of the local herpetofauna.

Recent collection efforts have focused on coastal areas, leaving much of rural Connecticut to be surveyed (see Figure 5E). Many of the new town records reported here are of common, widespread species that are to be expected in most, if not all, Connecticut towns, and undoubtedly many more town records for these species will be added in the future. Many of the historic town records reported in this paper also concern these widespread species and, even though no recent records from these towns exist, the historic records most likely reflect their current presence as well. The absence of recent records more often reflects the absence of recent survey data than the absence of species. However, in a few cases the historic records are likely to represent extinct populations. For example, specimens of Clemmys guttata and Clemmys insculpata from New Haven, collected in the 1870s, probably represent populations that have succumbed to habitat loss and habitat alteration. However, several of the new town records are from recent surveys in some of the most urbanized or otherwise heavily developed areas in Connecticut, indicating that the need for updated surveys is real.

Another issue we wish to highlight is the introduction of an exotic species in Connecticut. The sliders (Trachemys scripta scripta, Trachemys scripta elegans and Trachemys scripta truoeti) comprise a group of turtles, native to the southeastern and southern United States, that together range from southeastern Virginia to northern Florida, westward through Texas and north through the Mississippi watershed to northern Illinois and Indiana (Conant and Collins 1998). Sliders have been introduced to areas outside their natural distribution within North America, including New England (Christiansen 2001; Townsend et al. 2002; Emer 2004). Sliders are also established in many countries (Franz et al. 1993; Thrallhaupt and Van Dijk 1994; Haffner 1997; Jooris et al. 1998; Ota 1999; Agosta and Parolini 2000; Piovano and Giacoma 2000; Powell et al. 2000; Najbar 2001; Petterson et al. 2001; Arnold and Ovenden 2002; Nunez et al. 2002; Cadi et al. 2004; Iriarte et al. 2005; Lee 2005). Sliders are, in fact, essentially cosmopolitan now (Ter-Borg 2000), but have only been reported to occur in nonbreeding groups in Connecticut (Klemens 1993). Klemens (1993) suggests that the species cannot establish in the state because the summer season is too short for successful egg incubation.

We here report on reproductive behavior, and evidence of wild nesting success, of T. scripta in Connecticut. Because the source of introduced sliders is nearly always captive material, and the original geographic origin generally unknown, the use of subspecific nomenclature for introduced populations is problematic. Additionally, the likelihood of hybridization at commercial turtle farms and at release sites adds further confusion. For this reason, we adopt just the species level terminology for the introduced populations of slider turtles.

The earliest documented T. scripta found in Connecticut is YPM 2921, collected 24 June 1930 by Marshall B. Bishop in Woodbridge, Connecticut. This specimen was not cited in Lamson (1935), who made no mention of the species. DeGraaf and Rudis (1983) state that the species is introduced and established in parts of Massachusetts and Connecticut, but provide no additional data and none of their cited sources indicates an established population. Klemens (1993) states that the species occurs in Connecticut, but is not known to reproduce in the state, thus contradicting DeGraaf and Rudis (1983).

Beardsley Park in Bridgeport includes one man-made pond set aside for amphibian conservation efforts (lat 41.2136N, long 73.1820W), one dammed river (the Pequonnock River forming Bunnell's Pond), and a zoo with artificial wetlands and ornamental ponds. T. scripta has often been seen in all three areas of the park. While adults are most frequently encountered (consistent with Klemens 1993), on at least three occasions juveniles or eggs have been found. In addition, subadults and adults have been seen within the park boundary along the Pequonnock River and Bunnell's Pond,
and basking on the dam (lat 41.2066N, long 73.1870W).

In the spring of 2002, Dancho found a female digging a nest near the entrance to the zoo parking lot (approximately lat 41.2094N, long 73.1839W). The female was removed to the clinic and allowed to complete oviposition. The eggs were incubated, but none hatched. A juvenile was found on park grounds along the Pequonnock River near where the river feeds into Bunnell’s Pond (approximately lat 41.2169N, long 73.1808W) in the spring of 2004. Based on its size, the animal was estimated to be more than a year old. A second juvenile was found in April 2005 at the Amphibian Conservation pond. This individual was smaller, though not a hatching. Both the 2004 and the 2005 animals were captured and retained. On 12 October 2005, Dancho found a freshly hatched *T. scripta* in the zoo parking lot (lat 41.2090N, long 73.18W). The specimen (YPM 15053) is 30.8 mm in carapace length, with an umbilical mark and an egg tooth consistent with a recently hatched turtle. YPM 15053 could be the first specimen that documents breeding in the state for this introduced species. It is also likely to be the first documented breeding of the species in New England (see Klemens 1993). It is important to note that the Beardsley Zoo does maintain a group of *T. scripta* in an outdoor, screened enclosure. However, no animals are known to have escaped from the enclosure. Additionally, all of the *Trachemys* on exhibit were brought to the zoo by members of the public. Several of these were collected from within the city of Bridgeport and even a few from within the park itself. To date, the turtles on exhibit have not reproduced.

Thus, while evidence is lacking to suggest that *T. scripta* breeds in rural Connecticut or in more pristine habitats, it does indeed seem to be established as a breeding population in Bridgeport. Sliders are known to negatively impact native turtle species (Luiselli et al. 1997; Servan and Arvy 1997; Gianaroli et al. 1999; Cadi 2000; McKenna and Tramer 2001; Cadi and Joly 2003, 2004; Spinks et al. 2003; Mosimann and Cadi 2004). However, the species is still released intentionally throughout the world as discarded pets, by-products of the food industry, or as part of religious celebrations (see Cen 1998; Hennig 2004). Recently, studies have shown that juvenile sliders are a good biological control agent for mosquito lar-

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Literature Cited


