





**Red-eared slider turtle shell, *Trachemys scripta elegans* (carapace view)**  
HMSC Education Department Teaching Collection

Harvard Museum of Natural History turtles are sometimes featured on Afterschool Animal Encounters. Explore the various [educational opportunities](#) and [resources](#) offered by HMNH.

This is the shell of a red-eared slider, a turtle that is both common in the pet trade and an invasive species in many places. Their native areas range from the southeast of Colorado to Virginia and Florida—from the warm climate areas around the Mississippi River, Gulf of Mexico, and the southeastern United States. The top of the shell (carapace) is covered in scutes made of keratin. Most turtles have the same pattern of scutes: 5 large ones down the center, 4 pairs flanking, and a ring of small ones around the edge.

Contrary to what you've seen in cartoons, turtles will never crawl out of their shell as the backbone, ribs, hips, and shoulder blades have all been modified to become part of the structure of the shell. It serves as both protection and skeleton.

**Harvard Museums of Science & Culture (HMSC)** is a partnership of four Harvard museums that present captivating programming for all ages and a dynamic array of permanent and changing exhibits. HMSC invites you to connect with Harvard University's distinctive collections and vital research on human civilizations, biodiversity, and the history of Earth and science.

Share your creations with us on social media **#ColorOurCollections** and **#HMSCconnects**

### **Continue exploring our museums:**

[HMSC connects!](#)

[Collection of Historical Scientific Instruments](#)

[Harvard Museum of the Ancient Near East](#)

[Harvard Museum of Natural History](#)

[Peabody Museum of Archaeology & Ethnology](#)