



INTRODUCED SPECIES

First Account of the Northern Red-bellied Cooter (*Pseudemys rubriventris*) in the State of Florida, Orange County, Wekiwa Springs State Park.

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Photographs by Jessica T. Weber.

On 2 August 2009, during annual turtle population sampling at Wekiwa Springs State Park (28.71289°N, -81.45965°W, Datum WGS84), we collected a juvenile (max. CL 85 mm) Northern Red-bellied Cooter (*Pseudemys rubriventris*). This turtle was caught by hand while we were snorkeling the eastern side of the Wekiwa Springs lagoon. Photographs of the turtle were sent to the Division of Herpetology, Florida Museum of Natural History, University of Florida (UF 168594). Based on key morphological characteristics that differ significantly from the Florida Red-bellied Cooter (*Pseudemys nelsoni*) (see Conant and Collins 1991 and Buhlmann et al. 2008), this turtle was identified as a Northern Red-bellied Cooter (*Pseudemys rubriventris*). The identification was confirmed by Kenny Krysko, Tim Walsh, and George Heinrich.

No historical records document the presence of this species in Florida (Krysko et al. 2011). Many turtle species (e.g., Red-eared Slider, *Trachemys scripta elegans*; Mississippi Map Turtle, *Graptemys pseudogeographica kohnii*) have been widely

sold as pets in Florida. While the Northern Red-bellied Turtle might not be a common commodity of the pet trade, we believe circumstances in this case to be similar, with a young turtle being purchased or captured and subsequently released. Due to this individual's young age class (depicted in a picture with two *P. nelsoni* of the same size, max. CL 90 mm and 82 mm, respectively), and the minor amount of algal growth on its carapace, coupled with Wekiwa Springs State Park's proximity to cities such as Orlando and Daytona, where purchasing exotic species is possible (e.g., Kraus 2009), this turtle most likely had been released recently in the park.

Acknowledgements

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A juvenile Northern Red-bellied Cooter (*Pseudemys rubriventris*; UF 168594) collected in Wekiwa Springs State Park, Apopka, Florida.



Pseudemys rubriventris (UF 168594) shown on the far right alongside two *P. nelsoni* of the same size class, from Wekiwa Springs State Park, Apopka, Florida.

Literature Cited

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- Krysko, K.L., K.M. Enge, and P.E. Moler. 2011. *Atlas of Amphibians and Reptiles in Florida*. Final Report, Project Agreement 08013. Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, Tallahassee, USA.