

## Red-eared Slider Turtle Care Sheet

### Habitat:

Red-eared sliders love water. Allow them plenty of swimming space. A heat source and light for basking should be given if unfiltered sunlight is not available. Providing a basking log and a transition section so that your slider can move back and forth from basking to swimming with ease is essential.



### Temperature and Humidity:

It is recommended that warming water be at least twice the turtle's shell length, at a minimum. Temperature of the warming water should be about 75-86 degrees F and a large basking site is essential for red-ear sliders. Be sure to provide ample lighting and humidity.

### Feeding Your Turtle

Red-eared sliders are mainly carnivorous as juveniles, becoming more herbivorous as adults. In the wild the young eat water insects, crustaceans, mollusks, and tadpoles and then turn to a plant diet as they mature. The most important dietary requirements are vitamin D, calcium, and phosphorus, which are necessary in sufficient quantity and in the correct proportions to form the bones and shell of a growing turtle, without which the shell would become soft and deformed.

To ensure proper nutrition, strong growth and a healthy long-lived turtle, feed a varied diet to both adults and juveniles. Just remember that adults eat less animal protein and more vegetable matter. Juveniles must be fed every day; adults can be fed once every two to three days. Do not feed more than they can eat; the excess food will go to waste and foul the water. Feed a combination of the following foods:

#### Commercial diets (No more than 25% of total diet)

Trout Chow, commercial floating fish, reptile or turtle food (pellets, sticks or tablets). The pellets and sticks have the advantage of being formulated specifically for reptiles and don't decompose in the water as fast as other foods. Commercially prepared dry turtle food is recommended and Reptomin brand is available at most Wal-Mart stores as well as pet supply shops.

#### Animal Protein (No more than 25% of total diet)

Live feeder fish--do not feed frozen fish; they are deficient in thiamin and excess consumption will cause a thiamin deficiency in your turtle. Earthworms--buy them from a reptile or aquarium store; do not feed the ones from your yard as they may contain bacteria, parasites and pesticides against which your turtle has no immunity. Finely chopped raw lean beef, beef heart and cooked chicken; raw chicken is too often riddled with salmonella. High quality dog kibble can be offered occasionally--dog and cat foods tend to be too high in fat and additives and so should not be used as the main source of protein.

#### Plant Matter (50% or more of total diet)

Offer leaves of dark leafy greens such as collard, mustard and dandelion greens. Offer shredded carrots (and carrot tops), squash and green beans. Thawed frozen mixed vegetables may be used occasionally, but care should be taken as some

frozen green vegetables develop thiaminase which destroys that all-important B vitamin. Fruit can be offered raw; shred hard fruits like apples and melons, chopping soft fruits such as berries. To help keep their beak in trim, let them gnaw on pieces of cantaloupe with the (well washed) rind still attached.

Vitamin Supplements should be added twice a week. Use a good reptile or turtle multivitamin. Turtles must also be supplied with additional calcium; they often enjoy taking bites out of calcium blocks and gnawing on cuttlebone, so always have some available to them.

## **Cleanliness & Health:**

### **FILTRATION**

One of the most common problems confronting turtle keepers is that of maintaining water quality. Dirty water is a sure recipe for inducing bacterial and parasitic diseases. A dirty turtle tank also causes a terrible odor and is not a pleasant addition to the household! Regular water changes are one way of achieving this, but the process rapidly becomes tedious in the extreme. The practical solution is to employ a motorized filter system which will reduce the frequency with which total water changes are necessary. These are available in three main types:-

#### **Undergravel filters**

Undergravel filters can work very well, but do require a large surface area, low stocking density, and well oxygenated water. The types powered by an airlift (air pump) are not adequate for anything but the smallest hatchlings. Larger tanks should be fitted with a powerhead in place of the airlift.

#### **Internal canister filters**

Internal canister are relatively cheap and can be highly effective. Use the largest size you can install in your tank. The best filter medium in our experience is of the foam type. This can be taken out and washed whenever it becomes clogged.

#### **External canister filters**

External canisters are more powerful and for large tank systems this sort of filter is unbeatable. Again, we have found foam media to be the most effective but various other combinations are also possible as one of the benefits of this system is its tremendous versatility. The filter body is located outside of the tank, only the inlet and outlet tubes entering the terrapins environment. Use the largest model you can afford for an optimum result - which brings us to the only potential drawback, cost. Good external power filters are not particularly cheap, but definitely worth while if you keep large specimens in an indoor tank system as they will drastically reduce the need for frequent water changes.

### **LIGHTING**

Another factor often ignored by keepers is lighting. All indoor turtle tanks or ponds will require some form of artificial lighting. Under natural conditions, in the wild, many reptiles synthesize their own vitamin D3 from the UV component of sunlight. Vitamin D3 is essential for the effective metabolism of dietary calcium in reptiles. Certain wavelengths in the UV spectrum (290 - 320 nm) react with sterols in the skin

to produce pre-vitamin D3. This is in turn converted into vitamin D3 itself, using a process which also depends upon heat. Carnivorous and omnivorous reptiles get a high proportion of their vitamin D3 requirement from their food, however, plants do not contain D3, cholecalciferol, instead they contain D2, ergocalciferol, which is far less efficient in calcium metabolism than D3. Herbivorous reptiles kept indoors are, therefore, far more dependent upon the quantity and quality of artificial lighting than carnivorous specimens.

If inadequate vitamin D3 is available, the animal will rapidly develop the condition known as MBD or Metabolic Bone Disease. In this condition, bone density suffers and various other serious metabolic problems occur. Symptoms include swellings, lethargy, general weakness and tremors. The shell may also become soft and pliable. MBD remains the number one killer of captive lizards, tortoises and turtles (snakes are less affected as being highly carnivorous they easily obtain their D3 requirement via their prey). To prevent MBD, adequate levels of calcium must be present in the diet, and adequate (but not excessive) quantities of D3 must be provided by means of dietary supplementation or by exposure to adequate levels of UVB lighting. Rapidly growing specimens such as hatchlings are most at risk, although adults too will be affected if maintained in a state of deficiency for long enough.

### **UV-B Heat Lamps (Self-Ballasted Mercury Vapor)**



It is not often that a genuine revolutionary product comes along – but these lamps have proved a major hit with lizard keepers, and now tortoise and turtle keepers are also reporting excellent results. Superficially, they appear similar to a regular incandescent reflector lamp, but unlike a regular incandescent spot lamp, they also emit very significant levels of essential UV-B. The color of the light they emit is also much whiter, and brighter than a normal spot basking lamp. Not only that, but they also emit a very useful amount of heat. The levels of UV-B and UV-A produced by these lamps is extremely impressive. At 30 cm, it approximates that at midday in the Mediterranean. At 60 cm, it produces far more than even the best UV-B fluorescent tubes can manage at half the distance. The lifespan of these lamps is also excellent, with very useful levels of UV-B being produced even after 3,000 hours of use (by this time, tubes are virtually dead in terms of UV-B production). They appear expensive at first sight (from \$40-\$60 upwards each), but given their excellent performance and longevity, are actually cheaper in the long run than UV-B fluorescent tubes. As the levels of UV-B and radiant heat produced are extremely high, you must install them carefully and follow the maker's instructions to the letter. A heat resistant lamp holder is essential, for example. Two sizes are generally available, 100W and 160W

in spot or flood. For general use, we recommend the flood models. Larger 300W versions may also be available from some suppliers.

On sunny days when the outside temperatures are warm, feel free to put your turtle outside for a while for some sunshine. Either move your turtle tank outside, or set up a tub with basking and swimming areas. Exposure to full-spectrum lighting such as a Vita-Liter is recommended by some turtle experts, and is considered mandatory by others. Full-spectrum light is an essential part of the calcium metabolization process, and calcium deficiencies are very common in captive turtles. Many herpetoculturists use full-spectrum lights as, in addition to their importance in mineral metabolizing, they may have subtle psychological benefits such as improved appetite.

### **Health**

Watch your turtle for any signs of illness: cloudy, closed or swollen eyes; swollen cheeks; open mouth breathing; bubbly mucous around the nose or mouth; runny stools; loss of appetite; listlessness; spots appearing on plastron (bottom shell), carapace or body; soft shell or excessive shedding. Always take a sick turtle to a reptile veterinarian.

### **Acclimation and Handling**

After bringing home and placing your turtle in its already-established tank, let it get used to its new surroundings for several days. It may spend the first couple of days closed tight in its shell, or may quickly withdraw when it sees you looming overhead or approaching the enclosure.

During this time, put fresh food out every day and make sure the water stays warm and clean. After a while, the healthier turtle will begin to explore its surroundings, and may begin to watch the goings-on around it. When you pick up the turtle, support its body with both hands. Turtles feel more secure when they can feel something beneath their feet; "swimming" in air is stressful to them. Let them feel your hands or fingers beneath their feet, not just their plastron (bottom shell). A two-handed carry will also help ensure that they will not suffer a potentially crippling or fatal fall.

When your children's hands are big enough, teach them the proper way to hold and carry the turtle and to wash their hands with a proper antibacterial soap after handling the turtle. If they have been playing with any other animals before they go to handle the turtle, they should wash their hands before handling the turtle also. Remember to keep your tank free from uneaten food and keep the water cleaned and filtered to help prevent salmonella and other potentially harmful bacteria and diseases from getting in your environment.

Scientists believe that many cold-blooded animals, especially turtles and tortoises, can live almost forever as they show no signs of aging as they get older. They die from being successfully attacked by one of their few natural predators, from the poisoning or destruction of their natural habitat, and from improper care in captivity.