

If in doubt contact your local OATA retailer for further information

IMPORTANT THINGS TO REMEMBER:

ALWAYS PURCHASE test kits and regularly check the ammonia, nitrite, nitrate and pH. This will allow you to ensure that the water in your aquarium is not causing welfare problems for your terrapin.

ESTABLISH A ROUTINE for testing the water in your aquarium. Record your results to enable you to highlight fluctuations quickly. Also check the temperature of the water.

MAINTAIN the water in the aquarium within the accepted parameters highlighted in this leaflet. You may need to undertake regular water changes to achieve this.

ALWAYS wash your hands, making sure to rinse off all soap residues, before putting them into your aquarium. Wash them again afterwards and certainly before eating, drinking or smoking.

NEVER siphon by mouth. A fish tank can harbour bacteria which can be harmful. Purchase a specially designed aquarium gravel cleaner which can be started without the need to place the siphon in your mouth.

NEVER RELEASE YOUR AQUARIUM ANIMALS OR PLANTS INTO THE WILD.

Never release an animal or plant bought for a home aquarium into the wild. It is illegal and for most species this will lead to an untimely and possibly lingering death as they are not native to this country. Any animals or plants that do survive might be harmful to the environment.

Checklist...

Equipment:

- Aquarium
- Aquarium heater & guard, thermometer
- Aquarium filter
- Suitable substrate (large gravel, cobbles)
- UVB lighting/Mercury vapour lamp
- Suitable basking platform
- Food (frozen, live insects) & supplements
- Water test kits

Before purchase ensure that:

- The aquarium is suitable for an adult of the species chosen.
- The environmental conditions are as advised in this leaflet.



REPTILE AND EXOTIC PET TRADE ASSOCIATION

www.repta.org

ORNAMENTAL AQUATIC TRADE ASSOCIATION

www.ornamentalfish.org

Photograph courtesy of Paul Eversfield



How to care for...



Terrapins and Turtles

Introduction...

The term terrapin comes from a native American Indian name for a small aquatic turtle. It covers all freshwater turtles. The most commonly encountered aquatic reptiles seen in the trade are grouped into sliders and cooters. Both have similar husbandry requirements, but reach quite different sizes. Often seen for sale at hatchling sizes, it must be remembered that they soon outgrow their cute colourful appearance and their accommodation.

Environmental requirements...

Aquatic reptiles all require very good water quality. The guide below is a guideline as they can be acclimatised to other water types:

Temperature: 22-28 °C

Ammonia: 0 mg/l (0.02 mg/l may be tolerated for short periods)

Nitrite: 0 mg/l (0.2 mg/l may be tolerated for short periods)

pH: 6.5 - 8.0

UV Requirement: UVB heat bulb for basking area

Biology...

The term terrapin applies to all fresh water Chelonian species and their subspecies. The most commonly encountered species belong to the *Trachemys* genus (*Trachemys scripta scripta*—yellow-bellied slider and *T. s. elegans*—red-eared slider) and *Pseudemys* species otherwise known as “cooters”.

In general, the sliders are smaller than the cooters as adults with males reaching up to 10” (25 cms) and the females being a little larger at up to 13” (32.5 cms). Cooters, on the other hand get larger, with some subspecies attaining an adult length of up to 18” (45 cms).

Similarly to many other reptiles, terrapins can also live for a long time. It is not uncommon for many terrapins to live up to 20 to 30 years!

Basking terrapins as these animals might best be described, divide their day between time spent in the water where they hunt for food, and time spent out of the water basking in the sun and drying off. The importance of their basking behaviour is to absorb ultra-violet rays from the sun which helps promote vitamin D synthesis and uptake of calcium. This needs to be artificially recreated when keeping terrapins in captivity.

Aquarium requirements...

Whilst terrapins can be kept in smaller aquariums whilst they are young and small, always be prepared to upgrade to a larger indoor pond, to accommodate their fully grown size. As a general rule of thumb, a fully grown yellow-bellied slider of approximately 8” (20 cms) will require approximately 65 gallons (300 l) of water. The dimensions of the aquarium/indoor pond are equally important and must allow the terrapin to right itself should it fall on its back.

To warm the water, a normal aquarium heater-thermostat can be used. However, due to the active nature of terrapins, an aquarium heater guard should be used to prevent any accidental damage. The water must also be well filtered, not only to remove the solid waste that terrapins produce, but also to breakdown the invisible waste that may harm them.

To allow the terrapin to bask, a platform or bank must be offered. This can be achieved using floating or clip-on platforms or building up a bank using rock and wood. A UVB bulb or mercury vapour lamp (MVL) above this area should also be provided.

The substrate of the aquarium must be carefully chosen. The size of the gravel must be larger than the terrapins mouth to avoid accidental ingestion. In some circumstances, if swallowed, terrapins may have difficulty passing small bits of gravel which can lead to impaction within the digestive tract.

Maintenance...

At least every two weeks, a partial water change of 25-30% is strongly recommended. A siphon device can also be used to remove waste from the substrate. The water should be tested regularly to ensure that pollutants such as ammonia and nitrite don't build up. Replacement water, should be either left to stand or aerated to remove any chlorine present in tap water, or alternatively, a proprietary water conditioner can be used to remove chlorine more quickly.

Filters should be regularly checked for clogging and blockages. If the filter needs cleaning, do not run it under a tap as any chlorine present in tap water may kill the beneficial bacteria that has established within the media. Instead, clean any filter material in the water removed during a partial water change.

Good husbandry is essential as terrapins can be harmed by even the smallest amounts of ammonia and nitrite. Test the water every week especially during initial start-up.

Feeding...

Adult terrapins are omnivorous by nature, however, their diet changes as they age. The more carnivorous juveniles have a greater demand for high protein food items. At this age, they should be offered a wide range of specially formulated pellet diets, which should be supplemented with mussel, worms and even crickets. To aid the correct development of their shells, calcium should be provided as supplement or in the form of cuttlefish. As adults, their demand for high protein items diminishes and they should be give a greater proportion of vegetable matter and aquatic plants.

Terrapins should be fed daily. Any left over food should be promptly removed from the aquarium to reduce waste build up.

Common ailments...

Many of the ailments found in terrapins are as a result of an inadequate environment or diet. A suitable basking area can prevent some illnesses such as shell-rot. A lack of exposure to ultra-violet light can also lead to vitamin and mineral deficiencies. If any unusual changes in behaviour are noticed, check the water quality and environmental conditions. If in doubt, ask your retailer.

Compatibility...

As young terrapins are largely carnivorous, mixing with tropical aquarium fish must be avoided.

Cannibalism of juveniles by adult terrapins has sometimes been reported. Great care should therefore be taken when keeping adults and juveniles together.

Breeding...

All terrapin return to land to lay eggs. After finding a suitable spot, they will excavate a pit into which eggs will be laid. They are then buried and left. As such habitat is normally unavailable in captive environments, terrapins are highly unlikely to reproduce in captivity.

Surprisingly, females kept apart from males will still produce eggs. However, these eggs will not be fertile and will not result in any offspring.