



# CARE OF RED/YELLOW FOOTED TORTOISE

*Our Turtle & Tortoise Care Sheets are meant as a general guideline to caring for your Turtle/Tortoise. Every specific species requires its own unique care - while many species are overlapping and can be kept with other species that have similar needs.*

*For even more details about the needs of a specific species - or for ideas about which different species will go well together (many do), please contact us by phone or email. Thank you!*

## **GENERAL**

Red-footed Tortoises are among the best pet tortoises. They are colorful, hardy and long-lived. They are not as shy as Yellow-footed Tortoises but not as outgoing as Sulcatas.

## **DISTRIBUTION**

They are found in tropical and humid forest areas. They live in the underbrush and feed on fallen fruit, plant growth, and will even eat carrion.

## **SIZE**

They stay relatively small (12 inches to 16 inches for most types).

## **ENVIRONMENT & ENCLOSURE**

Most keepers use glass terrariums for small or medium sized Red-footed and Yellow-footed Tortoises. For young tortoises, we suggest a 20-gallon long terrarium (20" l x 12" w x 12" h). Medium tortoises will need a 40 breeder terrarium or larger. Keepers can also use plastic tubs, wooden cages, and other enclosures, but glass terrariums are easy to find at the local pet store and they come in a variety of sizes. We suggest taping paper on the back and sides of glass terrariums to keep the young tortoise from constantly trying to walk through the clear glass.

Of course, as the tortoise grows, it will need larger and larger enclosures. A pair of adult Red-foots will require an enclosure that is at least 4' wide x 6' long.



The substrate for Red-foots and Yellow-foots can be a mixture of ½ sand and ½ peat moss. A layer of cypress mulch can be placed over the top of the substrate to help hold in moisture. The addition of piles of dry leaves, hay, and plants in pots can add to the natural look of a Red-foot enclosure.

Heat should be provided using a heat-emitting bulb in a clamp-type fixture over the enclosure. Ideally, a keeper will hang a fixture overhead that will hold the bulb and keep it about 12" above the surface of the substrate. Most of these bulbs get very hot and so should be kept in a fixture with a ceramic base. The heat-emitting bulbs should provide a basking spot of 90° F (32° C) at one end of the enclosure. The heat in this area will allow the Red-foot to bask and to digest its food properly.

Most keepers will also place a shop light fixture overhead that is fitted with one or two UV-emitting bulbs. These can be found at your pet store or on-line from a variety of sources. UVB-heat bulbs® from T-Rex products and Zoomed Reptisun® bulbs will provide UV radiation to the enclosure. This UVB is necessary for Vitamin D3 synthesis, which allows the tortoises to properly use calcium and to carry on metabolism.

## **DIET**

Red-foots and Yellow-foots are omnivores, eating both animal and plant material in nature. In captivity they will feed eagerly on a mixed salad of fruits and vegetables every other day. They should be fed some higher protein items once or twice a week. Most Red-foots will eagerly feed on dead mice and dead chicks, but some keepers prefer to feed them a high-quality commercial food once a week. Mazuri Tortoise Diet® and Zupreem Primate Diet® ("Monkey Biscuits") are great supplements to the Red-foot's diet.

Water: Water should be offered in a large flat saucer. This can be a cat litter pan sunk into the substrate (make sure the tortoise can climb in and out easily) or a large plastic saucer which is normally placed under a potted plant. These can be easily cleaned and sterilized once a week or as needed.

## **HEALTH**

As with most other tortoises Red-foots and Yellow-foots are found in warm habitats. Thus, their captive enclosures should reflect this need. When kept cool for an extended period of time, a keeper can expect a tortoise to begin showing respiratory problems. The early signs are puffy eyes, runny noses, etc. A keeper should strive to maintain an enclosure that is hot and humid (but not soggy) to avoid these health issues.

Parasites: As Red-foot and Yellow-foot Tortoises are really only available as captive-hatched babies these days, a keeper should not be concerned about internal parasites. HOWEVER, many of the Red-foots available on-line are "farm-raised" specimens. These tortoises are being produced in HUGE



numbers on farms which are basically fenced off natural areas in their native habitat. These animals have arrived in great condition, but some have had problems with internal parasites from being fed in large numbers on the soil on these farms. If you are buying a farm-raised animal (4-5" animal from Brazil, Suriname, Venezuela, etc. / from a dealer and not the actual breeder) you should have a vet run a fecal exam for you. Collect a fecal sample in a plastic bag and take it to your local veterinarian. They will check it and offer treatment options for you. REMEMBER: Ivermectin, a famous wormer in the cattle industry, will KILL your tortoise. You might even remind your veterinarian of this fact though most will know.

## **RECOMMENDED READING**

- de Vosjoli, P. 1996. The General Care and Maintenance of Popular Tortoises. Advanced Vivarium Systems, Lakeside, CA.
- Gurley, R. 2005. SULCATAS in Captivity (with notes on other popular tortoises). ECO publishing, Lansing, MI.
- Highfield, A. 1996. Practical Encyclopedia of Keeping and Breeding Tortoises and Freshwater Tortoises. Carapace Press. England.
- Highfield, A. 2000. The Turtle and Tortoise Feeding Manual. Carapace Press. England.
- Paull, R. C. 1997. The Great Red-foot Tortoise. Green Nature Books. Homestead, FL.
- Pingleton, M. 2001. Practical Care and Maintenance of the Redfoot Tortoise.
- Pritchard, P.C.H. 1979. Encyclopedia of Turtles. T.F.H. Publications, Inc. Neptune, NJ.