

 Notes:

Keeping Tortoises As Pets



Duty of Care:

Every owner has a duty of care towards their animal. People should not take on the responsibility of keeping a pet unless they have the means to provide it with appropriate care and attention. This includes providing specialist treatment in the case of sickness or injury to prevent unnecessary suffering. Owners should arrange for their animal to be taken to a vet as soon as it becomes ill and be prepared to pay for any treatment themselves.

Hermann's Tortoises:

The Hermann's Tortoise is a colourful and robust species of Mediterranean Tortoise which hails from Southern Europe. They are friendly, hardy, and stay small to medium size. Hermann's Tortoises are herbivores with a natural diet high in fibre and calcium, low in fat and protein. When young, they have an attractive black and yellow patterned shell. Keeping a Tortoise is a long-term commitment - they can live for 100 years or more.

Housing

Even though it is believed that tortoises are able to live outdoors and are capable of surviving the various weather conditions, the limited period of warm weather and sunshine in the UK is not really enough for the tortoise to maintain correct husbandry. Therefore tortoises should always be kept warm and awake and never put through hibernation without seeking professional advice.. A good indoor enclosure can consist of a cardboard box with a UV light and heater at one end to create a temperature gradient. Ideally though, a vivarium consisting of thermostatically controlled heating and UV light will create a much more realistic and natural environment.

Types of Hermann's Tortoise

There are two subspecies - Western and Eastern. The Eastern Hermann's are the most common and tend to grow larger than the Western variety.

Feeding

Hermann's Tortoises are vegetarian, feeding on plants, greens, and flowers in the wild. The perfect Tortoise diet should be low in protein and fat but high in calcium and fibre. Note – lack of calcium is the most common nutritional problem in Tortoises so it is recommended that a calcium supplement such as Nutrabol be given at every meal. It is also a good idea to provide weekly supplements of vitamins A,B,C, and D.

Your Tortoise will enjoy eating dandelion leaves, endive, carrot, kale, watercress, and dark greens. Complete dry foods are available that provide a high source of fibre. A cuttlefish bone should be kept in the enclosure – an additional source of calcium.

Looking after your Tortoise

Exercise & Entertainment:

Hermann's Tortoises are a very active species that enjoys digging and climbing. It is important that their enclosure is big enough for them to move around freely and explore. Clean water should always be available and your Tortoises may enjoy a regular bathing too as it helps regulate their body temperature and speeds up their metabolism.

Handling:

In general Tortoises do not like being handled although there will be times when you need to do this out of necessity. Gently grasping either side of its shell and avoiding sudden movements is the best way.

Breeding:

Attempting to breed Tortoises is a huge undertaking requiring a serious degree of time and commitment. Always seek expert advice to be sure of the implications.

Tips for a happy healthy Tortoise

Community:

Hermann's Tortoises can live quite happily on their own – it is not crucial that they have a Tortoise companion – but as a rule, avoid mixing Tortoises of vastly different size and don't keep males together as they tend to be aggressive and fight. Females can live together happily, as can one male with 2 or 3 females. One male and one female together is not recommended – the male can become overbearing and aggressive. Never mix different species of Tortoise as this can transmit parasites and organisms that certain species may not be immune to.

Health:

For a healthy life, your Tortoise needs the following:

- A diet high in calcium and fibre, low in fat and protein
- Plenty of space to explore and forage
- No extreme or sudden changes in temperature
- Water and feed bowls cleaned daily
- Some type of indoor enclosure for colder days
- Regular dietary supplements of vitamins and calcium

Hibernation

This is a complicated procedure and you should ideally seek professional advice before you hibernate our tortoise. However before you even consider hibernating your tortoise, it should be of sufficient size and weight and be showing no signs of illness to cope with the stress of hibernation.

Your tortoise should be fasted for 2-3 weeks before hibernation (though fresh water must be provided). Your hibernation box should be well ventilated and be made of rat roof materials. The temperature should not fall below 2-3 C and not above 8C (optimum temperature is 5C). You should check your tortoise at regular intervals during hibernation.