



African Sideneck Turtles (*Pelusios castaneus*)

- A widely ranging species in Africa, the African side necked, or snake necked turtle is widespread over much of western and central Africa.
- A largely aquatic to semi aquatic turtle, side necks have a fairly smooth, streamlined carapace ranging from uniformly blackish, grayish black, brownish, to reddish brown in color.
- The most notable feature of these turtles are their long necks, which enable them to withdraw their heads and necks “sideways”.
- Sideneck turtles belong to the smaller of two major groups of turtles known collectively as the Pleurodira (or side necked turtles). Most other turtles belong to the group Cryptodira.
- If provided the correct care, side necked turtles can attain longevity of 20-30 years or more.

Size

Adult Sidenecks usually reach a carapace (shell) length of 7-12 inches, with females being larger.

Housing

Sideneck turtles are semi aquatic and powerful swimmers. Provide a sturdy, escape proof aquarium or commercially available turtle tub of sufficient size with an elevated dock or basking area/access to dry land using a substrate dam. Provide a minimum of 10 gallons of space per inch of shell, or about 50-120 gallons for most adult sidenecks and 6-8 inches of water. A powerful water filter rated at least twice that of the amount of water in the enclosure is highly recommended for aquatic turtles, as they are messy and require frequent cleaning and regular water changes. Use a submersible water heater with a guard to maintain water temperatures of 75-85 degrees F. Substrate is optional, and foregoing it makes for easier cleaning and maintenance, but small to medium sized gravel can be used. Additional rocks, logs, live or artificial foliage can also be provided for additional foraging and hiding opportunities. Additional overhead lighting and heating elements are necessary to maintain optimal health and nutrition for these turtles. Provide a basking area or platform with UVB and UVA for your sideneck to emerge completely from the water and monitor at around 85-90 degrees F.

Feeding/Diet

In the wild, sidenecks are primarily carnivorous, feeding on small fish, frogs, crustaceans, insects & other aquatic invertebrates, and carrion (dead animal matter).

In captivity, sidenecks can be given a variety of prey or food items including frozen/thawed pinkie mice, commercialized turtle pellets and diets, small feeder fish, superworms, earthworms, mealworms, feeder roaches or crickets, freeze dried shrimp, and other meats such as chicken, beef, and ground turkey. Dog and cat foods can also be used, but sparingly. A varied diet is important, and providing some additional vitamin D3 and calcium supplementation during 2-3 times weekly feeding also is beneficial.

Handling

Captive born and raised sidenecks can become very tame and personable pets, often even approaching their keepers for food. Handling these turtles from the rear of the carapace reduces the chances of being nipped or scratched when they are threatened, however.

****Also be sure to practice basic cleanliness and hygiene associated with proper husbandry after touching or handling any animals or animal enclosures to prevent the possibility of contracting salmonellosis or any other zoonotic pathogens****