



Star Tortoise *Geochelone elegans*

- All tortoises are mainly terrestrial (land dwelling) and are characterized by highly domed shells and large, elephantine like feet.
- Star tortoises are indigenous to the dry forests and scrublands of southern and southeastern Asia, including India, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka.
- Star tortoises are a medium sized tortoise with a large, domed black to dark brown carapace with highly sculptured scutes. Each carapace scute has a lighter yellowish to whitish radiating pattern of dashes and streaks giving this tortoise its common name.
- These tortoises, if given the proper care, and live for 50-70 years or more and require long term care and commitment.

Size

This species is sexually dimorphic, with males reaching 5 to 9” on average, and females reaching up to 15-16”.

Housing

Provide a secure and escape proof enclosure. If housed indoors, a minimum of a 6 foot by 4 foot or larger pen, enclosure, or stock tank is required. Glass aquariums are poor choices to maintain tortoises in. Substrates such as a mix of garden loam, peat or sphagnum moss, and/or coconut Bed a Best substrates are suitable choices. Outdoor pens can work during the warmer months in Wisconsin, and provide ample access to natural sunlight. Outdoor pens must have a substrate at least 8-9” deep and at least enclosure of at least 18” high. Ensure predators cannot access an outdoor cage. Although they derive much of their water from their food, provide a shallow water dish or pan within the enclosure. Change every 2-4 days or if fouled. Soak them in warm water at least weekly if low humidity is an issue. Provide an artificially heated hide box, vegetation, and other furnishings for added security, especially if housed outdoors.

Providing proper temperature, gradient among different microclimates, and humidity is critical. Provide a thermal gradient with a ceramic or radiant heat emitter, and overhead florescent and UVB incandescent lighting on a heavy duty clamp lamp. Ambient temperatures should be within 70-90 degrees F and the basking area of around 90-95 degrees F. Maintain a light cycle of 12-14 hours per day. Access or exposure to natural sunlight will also greatly benefit these tortoises in terms of acquiring D3Monitor temperatures with a quality thermometer. If kept outside, move inside if daily temperatures drop below 70 degrees, and below the 50’s at night. Respiratory issues in star tortoises as a result of poor or improper temperatures, enclosure, and/or setups are one of the most notable species specific husbandry related issues with star tortoises. Maintaining these factors correctly will greatly lessen or eliminate the possibility of encountering respiratory issues.

Spot clean the enclosure for urates, feces, or uneaten food at least twice per week. Be sure to periodically replace the substrate, clean, and disinfect the enclosure and its furnishings at minimum every 2-3 months.

Feeding/Diet

In the wild, these tortoises are primarily herbivorous, and will graze upon a variety of grasses, flowers, fruits, vegetable and other plant matter as well as occasionally carrion and invertebrates.

Feed star tortoises in captivity a mixed and varied assortment of chopped up flowers, dandelion, greens and vegetables daily (including but not limited to hibiscus, turnip, kale, mustard, and collard greens). A small amount of fruit is also acceptable. Be sure all food intended for tortoises is pesticide and herbicide free. Many of these are readily available in any

grocer's market. Do NOT give iceberg lettuce, grain products, or dog and cat food. Provide calcium and vitamin D3 supplements, as well as added protein in star tortoise diets whenever possible. Many vitamin supplements are also widely available.

Handling

Star tortoises tend to be a shyer species of tortoise, but can be interacted with and can become accustomed to their keepers over time. Tortoises in general should not be over handled due to the potential for stress related issues. **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**