



**Captive Bred Specialties*

Leopard Tortoise (*Stigmochelys pardalis*)

Safari Tortoises

Leopard tortoises are medium to fairly large tortoises with highly domed carapaces and sculptured scutes, a yellowish to brownish yellow shell, head, and limbs, with intricate, ornately patterned black to dark brown patterning on carapace. The leopard tortoise is primarily a herbivorous species of grazing tortoise, and are the most widely distributed species of tortoise in southern Africa. There are also several regional subspecies and variants of leopard tortoises which can vary in their shell shape and size, overall size, colors, and other slight anatomical features. Leopard tortoises are a widely ranging and well adapted tortoise to the arid to semi-arid regions of Africa, and as with many other tortoises, will withdraw their heads and limbs into their shells when threatened while expelling air to create a hissing sound. These features help the tortoises conserve water and prevent its loss through other associated behaviors. Leopard tortoises are the fourth largest species of tortoise in the world, although, as previously mentioned, can display significant variation in size. Leopard tortoises are beautiful and attractively colored and marked tortoises that have become increasingly popular as pets, and can make for great captive animals with the correct knowledge and space. These tortoises, if given the proper care, can live for 50 to 70 years or more and require long term care and commitment. All tortoises are mainly terrestrial (land dwelling) and are characterized by highly domed shells and large, elephantine like feet.

Taxonomy

Life: All living, physical, and animate entities

Domain: Eukaryota

Kingdom: Animalia

Phylum/Sub Phylum: Chordata/Vertebrata

Class: Reptilia

Order: Testudines

Suborder: Cryptodira

Superfamily: Testudinoidea

Family: Testudinidae

Genus: *Stigmochelys*

Species: *Stigmochelys pardalis**

**Taxonomy subject to change and revision.*

Lifespan and Longevity

Leopard tortoises, if given the proper care, can live for 50 to 70 years or more and require long term care and commitment.

Distribution and Habitat

Leopard tortoises are a well-adapted and widely ranging species of tortoise indigenous to much of Sub Saharan eastern and southern Africa including the Dominican Republic of Congo, Ethiopia, Kenya, Mozambique, Namibia, Somalia, South Africa, Sudan, Tanzania, and Uganda, to Zambia. Leopard tortoises can be found in the arid to semi-arid, thorny to rocky deserts, scrublands, grasslands, and savannahs within this range, although some variants may also occupy wetter, more humid environments.

Origin/History

Stigmochelys pardalis (Bell, 1828).

Leopard tortoises have been available in the pet trade for many decades since at least the 1960s, and were likely imported well before then. During the 1970s and 1980s, there was an increased demand for leopard tortoises as pets, which led to a significant increase in the number of animals being imported from their native range in Africa. These attractive mid-sized tortoises also became CITES Appendix II species in October 2017, which would more greatly regulate their exportation.

As of March 21st, 2000, and until further notice, the USDA would also restrict the importation and interstate transport of certain land tortoise species due to tick-borne illnesses. These species included leopard tortoises (*Geochelone pardalis*), African spurred tortoises (*Geochelone sulcata*), and Bell's hingeback tortoises (*Kinixys belliana*) into the United States.

Experience Level Required

Intermediate/Moderate.

Size

Adult leopard tortoises are small to medium sized tortoise species typically ranging from 15 to 18 inches in carapace, or upper shell length depending on the species, age, and gender, as well as locality.

Housing and Enclosure

Enclosure System: Primarily Terrestrial. Provide a secure and escape proof enclosure. If housed indoors, a minimum of a 6 foot by 6 foot pen, tortoise table, or other enclosure should be used. Substrates that enable burrowing such as a mix of fine aspen chips, organic bark, or coconut fiber substrates are acceptable substrates to use for these mid-sized tortoises. Outdoor pens can work during the warmer months in temperate to sub-tropical climates, and can provide ample access to natural sunlight. Outdoor pens must have a perimeter at least 8 to 9 inches deep and at least 12 inches high. Be sure the enclosure is adequately sealed to prevent access by outdoor predators. Although they derive much of their water from their food, it is best to provide a shallow water dish or pan within the enclosure, which should be changed every several days or if fouled. Soaking your tortoise at least weekly in lukewarm water can also serve as added hydration. Providing an artificially heated hide box if housed in outdoor enclosures can provide for added safety and security for these tortoises.

Temperature, Lighting, and Humidity

Providing the correct amounts of UVA/UVB overhead incandescent and florescent lighting, and calcium-to-phosphorus ratios is essential for ensuring the health and overall well-being of leopard tortoises in captivity. Without UVA/UVB, or adequate amounts of it, they can be susceptible to the abnormal bone and shell growth and development known as Metabolic Bone Disease (MBD), and other health and development maladies. Pyramiding of the scutes and shell

can also occur due to poor or improper diet, lighting, or heating. Always be sure to 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 to 3 months. These tortoises require a thermal gradient using a ceramic or radiant heat emitter, UTH (or under tank heating pad), and UVA/UVB overhead lighting. Ambient temperatures should be within 70 to 82 degrees F and the basking area should be from 90 to 95 degrees F. Maintain a light cycle of 12 to 14 hours per day, and monitor temperatures with a quality thermostat. If kept outside, move inside if daily temperatures drop below 70 degrees, and below the 50's at night. Spot clean the enclosure for urates, feces, or uneaten food at least twice per week, and be sure to periodically replace the substrate, clean, and disinfect the enclosure and its furnishings at minimum every 2 to 3 months. More specific lighting, heating, and humidity product suggestions and recommendations that can best suit one's needs, as well as those of one's animals can be given as well. Leopard tortoises should ideally be maintained at, or around about 40 to 60% relative humidity.

Feeding, Diet, and Nutrition

Primarily Herbivorous; In the wild, leopard tortoises are herbivores, and will graze upon a variety of grasses, flowers, and other plant matter. In captivity, these mid-sized tortoises can be given a mixed and varied assortment of chopped up greens and vegetables daily or as otherwise directed. Avoid spinach, citric fruits, Iceberg lettuce, and other acidic or otherwise nutritionally poor food items. More food items to avoid include most grain products, and dog and cat foods. Many flowers, dandelions, hibiscus, turnip, kale, mustard, and collard greens are also suitable choices. Ensure that all food intended for food for herbivorous to omnivorous animals is chemical, pesticide and herbicide free. Many of these are readily available in any grocer's market. Several commercially available herbivore and veggie mix diets are also available which can be used. Food items given should be sprayed with additional calcium and vitamin D3 supplementation 1 to 2 times weekly or as otherwise directed for optimal health and development. This is in order to prevent Metabolic Bone Disease (MBD), shell pyramiding, and other shell and bone growth and nutritional deficiencies and maladies. Their feeding frequency can also often depend on the age, size, and overall health of your animal. Use care as to not overfeed turtles or tortoises, as obesity and other health related issues can become an issue. Some mid-sized to large tortoises can be pickier eaters than others, sometimes preferring certain foods over others, and require some trial and error to determine which foods may be preferred by your tortoise. Several books, websites, and other resources are also available that provide further in-depth detail as to proper leopard tortoise diets, and which foods are acceptable to use and which are not. More specific dietary and supplementary product suggestions and recommendations that can best suit one's needs, as well as those of one's animals can be given as well.

Handling

Most small to mid-sized turtle and tortoise species that are not aggressive or prone to biting can be picked up and handled either by placing both hands along both sides of the shell, or from the rear of the carapace with the thumb on the carapace and index through pinky fingers on the plastron to reduce the chances of being kicked, scratched, or nipped when they are threatened. Although most species of chelonians are not outwardly aggressive, defensive, or dangerous, they can become stressed as a result of over-handling, however, and some species, and even individual animals can be shyer than others. These are some considerations to keep in mind when handling any chelonian species.

****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****

Contact

Authored by Eric Roscoe. For any additional questions, comments, and/or concerns regarding this animal, group of animals, or this care sheet, please email and contact:

Eric.S.Roscoe@gmail.com

Disclaimer: Note that the information provided in these, or any care sheets, are not intended to be all-exhaustive, and further research and care should always be sought and provided when it comes to any species one may prospectively be interested in. These care sheets are also not intended to serve as substitutes for professional veterinary medical care and husbandry should any animal require it. Always seek proper and professional veterinary care for any animal should the need arise, and be prepared ahead of time for any and all husbandry costs and expenses that may occur with any animal beyond the initial purchase. Any animal owned is ultimately a matter of personal/individual care and responsibility. We cannot make any claims or guarantees regarding any information in this care sheet therein. This care sheet may be reprinted or redistributed only in its entirety.

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