

Chelus fimbriatus – The Mata Mata – Ben Forrest
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Note: The Mata mata has been known to man for quite some time. Due to its highly unusual appearance it has garnered a lot of interest from taxonomists. This interest has resulted in a great many different binomials being used over the years to refer to this species. When looking for older information referring to this monotypic genus it is best to use the genus name or search on any of the various species names that have been used to refer to it in the desired time frame.*

Synonyms:

Testudo terrestris FERMIN 1765 (nomen oblitum, non T.t. Forskål 1775)
Testudo fimbriata SCHNEIDER 1783
Testudo fimbria GMELIN 1789 (nomen subst. pro T. fimbriata SCHNEIDER)
Testudo matamata BRUGUIÈRE 1792
Testudo bi-spinosa DAUDIN 1802
Testudo rapara GRAY 1831 (nomen nudum)
Testudo raparara GRAY 1844 (nomen nudum)
Testudo raxarara GRAY 1855 (nomen nudum)
Chelys fimbriata - GÜNTHER 1882
Chelys fimbriata - BOULENGER 1889
Chelus fimbriatus - MERTENS 1934
Chelus fimbriata - IVERSON 1992
Chelus fimbriatus - GORZULA & SEÑARIS 1999

Common name: Mata mata, Mata-mata, matamata



This care sheet is intended only to cover the general care of this species. Further research to best develop a maintenance plan with a goal of reproducing whichever species/subspecies you are caring for is essential.

The supremely camouflaged Mata mata is well adapted to living in slow moving detritus filled bodies of water where they are found. Native to South America in both the the Orinoco River and Amazon River basins they are also reported to be found in Trinidad. A Mata mata in its natural environment does not APPEAR to be invisible, it IS invisible. Ones first exposure to a Mata mata usually follows a predictable path. The first reaction is "Turtle? I don't see a turtle", then "Where is it? – I don't see anything", then "Where?" followed finally by "Wow".

Housing Mata mata

Aquariums are suitable for small to medium 4-10 inch turtles. Larger turtles, up to their maximum size of 18 inches, will need larger stock tanks or custom made ponds with a holding capacity of more than 100 gallons. Water depth should be no deeper than the straight carapace length (SCL) of the smallest turtle. Mata mata will thrive at water temperatures of 76-83 degrees F with a similar air temperature. Abrasive surfaces must be avoided in the enclosures. The pH of the water should be kept in the 5-6 range. Adding peat to the water should achieve this as well as give the turtles something to root around in. Lighting should not be too bright and

plenty of hiding places are a must. Plants potted in clay pots work well for cover as well as visual barriers when more than one turtle is kept together. Plants have the added benefit of helping maintain water quality. Females are the more aggressive of the sexes and will bite at smaller turtles of either sex if inclined.

Diet

Mata mata are strict carnivores; fish, invertebrates, and the occasional frog would make up the diet of a wild Mata mata. All Matas that have been under my care have learned to take dead prey items off of forceps. Offering items that have been frozen eliminate most parasite and bacterial infection risks, which are especially prevalent in stocks of overcrowded feeder fish.

Frozen thawed fish and shrimp can easily be supplemented with vitamins and calcium. This is especially important with thiamin and vitamin E. Occasionally loading food items with leafy greens and/or sweet potatoes and carrots is highly recommended. Food should be offered 1-2 times weekly for adults and 3-4 times for juveniles. Offer as much as they will eat at each feeding.

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This species does not hibernate in nature. Facilities should be provided for the continued health and well being of the tortoise indoors in cooler conditions.

Medical:

Mata mata are fairly difficult to adjust to captive conditions, at any sign of a disease a veterinarian should be contacted. Please be aware that that drug dosage and administration information available on the Internet or in hobbyist books is often dated, developed for other species, and possibly dangerous, please leave drug advice to trained professionals.

It should be noted that turtle and tortoise care research is ongoing. As new information becomes available we share this on the World Chelonian Trust web site at www.chelonia.org. Serious keepers find it to be a benefit to have the support of others who keep these species. Care is discussed in our free online email community, which may be joined from the web address above. Please contact us about the many benefits of becoming a member of the World Chelonian Trust

