

Chinemys nigricans (Kwangtung River Turtle) Care – Darrell Senneke

Copyright © 2003 World Chelonian Trust. All rights reserved

Taxonomic Journey*:

Emys nigricans GRAY 1834
Clemmys nigricans STRAUCH 1862 (part.)
Damonia nigricans GRAY 1870
Clemmys nigricans - SIEBENROCK 1903
Geoclemys kwangtungensis POPE 1934
Chinemys nigricans FANG 1934
Clemmys kwangtungensis - MELL 1938 (ex errore)
Chinemys kwangtungensis - BOURRET 1941
Chinemys nigricans - IVERSON & MCCORD 1989
Mauremys nigricans - KING & BURKE 1989
Chinemys nigricans - OBST 2003

Alternate Common names:

Redneck Pond Turtle
Kwan Tung River Turtle



This care sheet is intended only to cover the general care of this species. Continued research in order to best develop a maintenance plan for whichever species you are caring for is essential.

Often confused with the closely related Reeves turtle, the tendency of many people is to dismiss them as a Reeve's turtle that is a "bit different" or "on steroids". While the care is similar and the animal does bear a distinct resemblance when young to the Reeve's it is very worthy of attention and appreciation by the turtle hobbyist. The species originates in North Vietnam, South China and on Hainan and Taiwan Islands. One of its common names stems from it being found in the Province of Kwangtung in Southern China, the other common name, the Redneck Pond Turtle, is descriptive as the neck of the turtle appears to be a dark reddish brown. In the wild its habitat is slow moving rivers, streams and ponds. In marked contrast to the diminutive Reeve's turtle the Kwangtung has a carapace that can reach 10 inches in large females making it a bit more difficult to adequately house indoors as an adult than the diminutive Reeve's. Coloration is an overall dark brown with faint stripping on its neck, the plastron is sparsely marked with dark spots on a light background. In shape the Kwangtung has the characteristic *Chinemys* boxy shell, much less streamlined than that of *Trachemys* or *Chrysemys*

Initially found only as imported stock from the Asian food markets, this species is now being bred in fair numbers by the private sector in both Europe and the United States. I would strongly suggest that one not purchase a wild caught *C. nigricans*. While captive born stock is very hardy, the stress of capture, handling, containment with other species and the shipping of wild caught Kwangtung's and Asian species in general leads to a severely debilitated animal that tends to be in need of immediate veterinary care.

This care sheet will deal primarily with hatchling care, as that is the most critical stage of their lives as well as the age that they are most likely to be purchased.

HOUSING THE KWANGTUNG TURTLE INDOORS - *C. nigricans* are more accurately termed a "semi-aquatic". though they are more aquatic in the authors opinion than the similar Reeve's. Hatchlings are almost totally aquatic, leaving the water primarily to bask. In captivity they are generally treated as an aquatic species and adapt well to aquarium management when small.



The most useful form of indoor accommodation for hatchling *Chinemys nigricans* consists of a shallow aquarium or plastic sweaterbox. While they are at home in water they are fairly poor swimmers, I would suggest a water depth of 2 inches (5 cm) or less to allow them to "stand" on the bottom and reach the surface to breathe without difficulty. If this type of arrangement is used an area should be built up in one end of the habitat to provide a dry basking area. In this arrangement, because of the shallowness of the water, filtration is difficult and uneaten food can be missed and rapidly foul the water. Water must be changed in this type of setup very frequently.

As an alternative to this what I use for all hatchling semi-aquatics and most aquatic species is an undecorated "slant tank". A sweaterbox measuring about 24 inches by 16 inches (60 cm by 40 cm) is propped up on one end to provide a slanted bottom, resulting in a water depth at the lowest end of 2 inches (5 cm) and a dry area at the shallow end. As this is undecorated it is easily cleaned on a frequent basis. The addition of live or plastic water plants add to the sense of security for the animals and in the case of live plants may provide an additional food source. As the animal grows the size of this habitat and depth of water should be increased.

At 6 cm (2.5 inches) or so, the rapidly growing Kwangtung turtles can be moved out of this arrangement and into a proper aquarium. A reasonable size aquarium for a Kwangtung turtle of this size is a 20 gallon: 75 cm by 30 cm (30 inches by 12 inches). As the animal grows the size of this habitat should be increased. A water depth of 20 cm up to 40 cm (8 inches to 16 inches) would be fine for turtles between 6 cm (2.5 inches) and the typical adult size of 15 cm - 25 cm (6 inches - 10 inches).

Water quality is very important. Because of the shallowness of the water in a "slant tank" filtration may not be practical. In this event frequent water changes are a must. For adult Kwangtung turtles we advise canister filters as they are easily cleaned and provide for excellent water quality, if kept in a pond a more typical pond filter - oversized to deal with the fact that turtles produce more waste than fish - should be used. Many problems with aquatic turtles can be averted if one spends a little time and money designing and purchasing an adequate filtration system for your pets.

Kwangtung turtles are often seen basking on logs or rocks in nature. To provide a basking site in an artificial setup a hardware store reflector clip light lamp should be positioned over the dry end of the environment. This should be positioned at a height to provide a basking spot of 90 degrees F or so (32 degrees C) in that section of the habitat. The habitat should also be equipped with a full spectrum fluorescent light to provide for UVB. A UVB source is necessary for Vitamin D3

syntheses (needed in calcium metabolism). If preferred to this lighting arrangement a Mercury vapor bulb may be used that fulfills all requirements.

DIET. Kwangtung River turtle hatchlings take rapidly take to many offered foods. Be careful not to overfeed them, I recommend only feeding once every day or every other day for the rapidly growing hatchlings. Hatchling Kwangtungs are very carnivorous and will eagerly consume insects and worms and thawed frozen fish but will also consume some greens. Please note - they also very eagerly nip the tail tips of tank mates. Any aquatic vegetation such as duckweed will also be appreciated. As they age they tend to take a higher percentage of vegetation. Many of the commercially prepared turtle diets as well as Koi or Catfish foods that exist on the market today are excellent hatchling *C. nigricans* food. As in all diets for turtles and tortoises, variety is something that should be strived for.

Additional calcium supplementation is essential. Powdered calcium can be sprinkled all foods. It is suggested that one use calcium supplemented with vitamin D3 if the animal is being maintained indoors and calcium without D3 if it is outdoors. Provision of a cuttlefish bone, which can be gnawed if desired, is also recommended. Addition of multivitamins if a commercially prepared turtle diet is NOT used is essential for proper fat metabolism. The freezing process for fish destroys the vitamin E, which is an important component for maintaining a healthy Kwangtung River turtle.

OUTDOOR HOUSING - Once your turtle is over 3 inches (7.5 cm) in size predator-proof outdoor habitats offer many advantages over indoor accommodations and should seriously be considered as an option. A child's wading pool sunk into the ground in a secure enclosure makes for a serviceable outdoor habitat. Larger ponds with advanced filtration can be used to provide a spectacular outdoor home for your turtle. While there appears to be a "cycle" as they slow down in the winter, Kwangtung River turtles are not known to fully hibernate. Provision must be made in areas that experience freezing temperatures to provide ice free habitations.

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.

References:

*The EMBL Reptile Database <http://www.embl-heidelberg.de/~uetz/LivingReptiles.html>

www.chelonia.org - World Chelonian Trust

World Chelonian Trust
685 Bridge Street Plaza PMB# 292
Owatonna, MN
55060