

***Pseudemys* - (Cooter and Redbelly Turtles) - Darrell Senneke**  
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- P. alabamensis* - Alabama Redbelly Turtle
- P. concinna* - Eastern River Cooter
- P. floridana* - Florida Cooter
- P. gorzugi* - Western River Cooter
- P. nelsoni* - Florida Redbelly Turtle
- P. peninsularis* - Peninsula Cooter
- P. rubriventris* - Eastern Redbelly Turtle
- P. suwanniensis* - Suwannee River Cooter
- P. texana* - Texas River Cooter



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

Some of the most commonly seen turtles in the Southern United States are the Cooter and Redbelly turtles. Distinguishing characteristics are their large size, thin yellow lines in their heads, necks and legs and their attractively patterned carapace. While this species frequently basks they are much more shy than the sympatric *Trachemys* species and as a result they may be more common in an area than suspected by casual observers. In diet they are somewhat similar to many primarily herbivorous species but the young do take animal matter on a reducing frequency till they reach adulthood and their more strict vegetarian diet. As in *Trachemys* the male courts the female by waving his front claws in front of her.

These are large turtles and should not be purchased unless one is prepared for an adult size exceeding 12 inches.

**HOUSING *Pseudemys***

**INDOORS** - The most useful form of indoor accommodation for *Pseudemys* consists of an aquarium. For hatchlings I would suggest a water depth of 3 to 6 inches (7.5 to 15 cm) with one end built up with rocks to provide a dry basking spot. A reasonable size aquarium for a hatchling is a 20 gallon: 30 inches by 12 inches, (75 cm by 30 cm). As the animal grows the size of this habitat should be increased. All *Pseudemys* are excellent swimmers so water depth is not a very critical factor as they get older. A depth of 10 inches up to 30 inches (20 cm to 60 cm) would be fine for turtles between 4 inches (10 cm) and adult size. Adult size of the Eastern River Cooter can reach 12 inches and other species grow even larger. At this size an outdoor pond would be a much more realistic accommodation than an aquarium.

**Pseudemys - Cooter and Redbelly Turtles**

- **Location** - Southern United States
- **Habitat** - Ponds, rivers,
- **Size** - 32 cm (13 inches)
- **Diet** - Highly herbivorous with a small amount of protein taken
- **Conservation Status** - Varies with species - some threatened / endangered
- **Threats** - habitat loss
- **Alternate Names** - Variations on Cooter and redbelly

Water quality is very important. 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. For larger *Pseudemys* we advise canister filters as they are easily cleaned and provide for excellent water quality. Hatchlings are more difficult to provide good filtration for because of the depth of the water, for these a submersible foam filter or power filter and frequent water changes is the rule.

In one corner of the environment a hardware store reflector clip light lamp should be used to provide artificial basking facilities. This should be positioned 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 both heat and UV requirements. Live or plastic aquatic plants are suggested to provide a sense of security and hiding places.

**OUTDOOR HOUSING** - Predator proof outdoor habitats offer many advantages over indoor accommodations and should seriously be considered as an option during warm weather. 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 Cooter or Redbelly Turtle.

**DIET.** Be careful not to overfeed your Cooter. I recommend only feeding 2 to 3 times a week for adult turtles and every day or every other day for the rapidly growing hatchlings. Adult *Pseudemys* are very vegetarian by nature and will consume vegetables, greens such as mustard greens, turnip greens, dandelion, spinach, carrots, zucchini and any aquatic vegetation, i.e. duckweed, water lettuce, water hyacinth, etc. While it is a much more minor part of their diet, they will also consume insects, worms and crayfish. In hatchlings this protein hunger is more apparent but they are still primarily herbivorous. Many of the commercially prepared turtle diets that exist on the market today are excellent Cooter food, in addition commercial low protein diets intended for koi or goldfish may be used as a part of a varied diet.

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.

Most of these species hibernate in nature. After careful research of methods used to safely do this, hibernation facilities may be provided for the turtle.

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](http://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.

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