

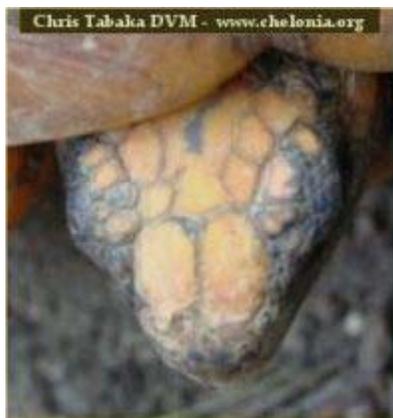


This care sheet is intended only to cover the general care of this species. Further research to best develop a maintenance plan for whichever species/subspecies you are caring for is essential.

Red-foot tortoises are among the most popular and appropriate tortoises for beginning tortoise keepers. Stunningly attractive, their black shell contrasts with their yellow scute areola, bright red legs and yellow or red markings on their head. Being from multiple habitats, they are among the hardiest of species. As long as their requirements are met, Red-foots can be expected to give literally a lifetime of companionship. While they do get fairly large, one over 16 inches (40 cm) would be considered exceptional with most attaining a length of 14 inches (35 cm) or so. There is also a smaller "dwarf" variant called a Cherry-head that only attains a length of 10 - 12 inches (25 - 30 cm) as an adult.

Upon initial sighting, a Red-foot tortoise, *Geochelone carbonaria*, looks very similar to the closely related Yellow-foot tortoise, *G. denticulata*, with the primary distinction being the presence of yellow scales on the forelegs of the Yellow-foot and red scales on the forelegs of the Red-foot (thus the common names for each). However, of all of the differences between these two species, this is actually the most variable. While Red-foots may be more intensely colored, this is not a universal distinction; there are Yellow-foots that are very brightly patterned and comparatively drab Red-foots. While there are numerous morphometric differences between these two species, by far the easiest method of telling Red-foots and Yellow-foots apart is the differences in the scalation of their heads. Yellow-foots have elongated prefrontal scales and a fragmented frontal scale. Red-foots have shortened prefrontals and an intact frontal scale. The prefrontal and frontal scales are the scales at the tip of the nose. In addition to this obvious difference, female Red-foot tortoises are more elongated, looking much like a loaf of bread while older male Red-foots tend to develop an hourglass shape. Adult Yellow-foots of both sexes tend to be wider/ rounder and somewhat flatter in their overall shape.

Comparison of Prefrontal Scales of *Geochelone denticulata* and *Geochelone carbonaria*



Yellow-foot Tortoise



Red-foot Tortoise

HOUSING RED-FOOTS INDOORS - The most common form of indoor accommodation for small or medium sized red-foot Tortoises consists of a "turtle table" To all appearances this looks like a bookshelf unit flipped onto its back. A reasonable size for a hatchling is 2 feet by 3 feet as the animal grows the size of this habitat should be increased. For an adult red-foot tortoise the indoor accommodation should be at least 6 feet by 4 feet Into the bottom of this "turtle table" holes can be cut to allow for the sinking of food , water and eventually nesting containers flush with the surface for easier animal access.

The water area of the habitat should be large enough to allow the tortoise to soak in it if it wishes - it must also be shallow enough to protect from drowning. Cypress mulch is the indoor substrate of choice for this species due to it's humidity retention characteristics which in turn leads to good scute and skin health.

In one corner of the environment a 100W spot lamp should be positioned to provide artificial basking facilities. This should be positioned to provide a basking spot of 95 degrees F or so 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. There should be a hide box located in the corner away from the basking spot to allow the animal a cool dim retreat.

OUTDOOR HOUSING - Predator proof outdoor habitats offer many advantages over indoor accommodations and should seriously be considered as an option during warm weather. Overall, this species does best in naturally humid climates outdoors. If your area is not naturally humid, water timers and a misting/sprinkler system can be utilized to artificially create one. Some areas of the habitat should be heavily planted to allow the Red-foot a cool dim retreat. Provision of a wet muddy area for wallowing will also be appreciated by your tortoise. Redfoots take readily to using a hutch or doghouse-like artificial retreat. In areas with cool nights a thermostatically controlled ceramic heater in such a retreat will provide the tortoise with an area that remains above 60 degrees F (16 C)

DIET - Red-foots are omnivorous, consuming both animal and plant material in the wild. In captivity this may be duplicated by feeding a minimal amount of low fat dog food or whole meat product once every couple weeks or so. Meat should not be fed as a part of the daily diet. Occasional earthworms may be fed as well. We have found that red-foots thrive on a diet supplemented with Mazuri Tortoise Diet which was initially formulated for the closely related Galapagos Tortoises.



The diet offered should consist of:

- Leafy greens (dandelions, clover, endive etc.)
- Fruits
- OCCASIONAL meat based protein.

Diets rich in meats are invariably high in phosphates and low in calcium. This can cause serious problems for tortoises who need high levels of calcium for healthy bone and carapace development. Additional calcium supplementation is therefore absolutely essential. For proper growth as well as egg production, powdered calcium can be sprinkled on all foods once a week to help meet these requirements. 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 required, is also recommended. The substrate of choice is cypress mulch or something possessing the same humidity holding properties in order to keep their shells/skin from drying out in captive conditions. In outdoor pens in areas of high sand content, food should not be placed directly on sandy soil. Sand can build up in the tortoises GI tract leading to possible impaction and even death. A completely separate sand-free area in the habitat should be utilized to feed.

This species does not hibernate in nature. Facilities must be provided for the continued health and well being of the tortoise indoors in cooler (non tropical) climates.

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.

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