



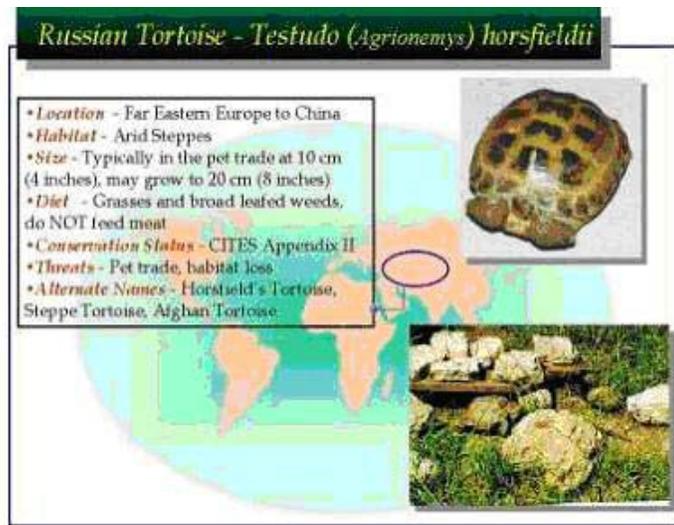
This care sheet is intended only to cover the general care of this species. Further research to best develop a maintenance plan for whichever species/subspecies you are caring for is essential.

Ranging from China to the countries of Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan the Russian Tortoise, also known as Horsfield's tortoise, is found over vast areas of dry arid habitat. There are at least three recognized subspecies of *Testudo horsfieldii*: *T. horsfieldii kazachtanica*, *T. horsfieldii rustmovi* and *T. horsfieldii horsfieldii*. While there are no differences in care presently offered based on subspecies, there are (in press) reports of varying success in captive breeding based on subspecies and differences in the varying subspecies ability to acclimate to captivity.

Adult Russian tortoises vary from 4 to 8 inches in length, and are found in a range of colors from bright yellow to nearly black. Most Russians are olive drab to brown in coloration.

HOUSING RUSSIANS

INDOORS - The most common form of indoor accommodation for Russian 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 foot by 3 foot as the animal grows the size of this habitat should be increased. For an adult Russian tortoise the indoor habitat should be at least 4 foot by 2 foot. 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. Please note: This is an aggressive species to its own kind. If housing more than one male or a pair of this species you must provide sightline breaks and a large habitat to prevent males from damaging females or each other.



The water dish in 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. While this species would seldom encounter standing water in the wild, our inability to properly duplicate the climate that they are adapted to makes provision of a water source a safety net against dehydration. As a substrate in the dry portion of the environment a mixture of topsoil and children's play sand works well.

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 both heat and UV requirements. There should be a hide box located in the corner away from the basking spot to allow the animal a cool dim retreat. While Russian tortoises can handle cool weather quite well, cold combined with wet conditions often leads to disease. They must be kept in an area with a dry retreat.

OUTDOOR HOUSING - Predator proof outdoor habitats offer many advantages over indoor accommodations and should seriously be considered as an option during warm weather. As these tortoises burrow this must have sides extending well beneath the surface of the soil. If they are kept in areas of high rainfall provision through drainage or landscaping must be made to insure that a good portion of their environment does not become overly wet.

DIET - A high fiber, low protein and calcium rich diet will ensure good digestive tract function and smooth growth. Horsfield's tortoises fed on cat or dog food frequently die from renal failure or from impacted bladder stones of solidified urates. Avoid over reliance upon 'supermarket' greens and fruits which typically contain inadequate fiber levels, excessive pesticide residues and are too rich in sugar. Fruits should be given very sparingly or not at all to this species as they are not metabolically suited to properly digest them. Feeding fruits can lead to diarrhea.

Diet:

- Leafy greens (dandelions, clover, endive, weeds etc.)
- Grasses

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 required is also recommended. Occasional supplementation with a vitamin complex is encouraged.

MEDICAL - Unfortunately, a number of these animals are in very poor shape due to the stress of handling and shipping as well as the mixing of sick animals with healthy ones. If at all possible, purchase captive bred animals- especially of this species. If you do purchase a wild caught horsfieldiii, see a veterinarian immediately. At the minimum, the animal will likely have a number of parasites.

COMBAT - Special care must be taken to insure that combat between Russian tortoises does not become life threatening.

This species hibernates in nature. After careful research of methods used to safely do this, hibernation facilities may be provided for the continued health and well being of the tortoise.

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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