



Western New York Herpetological Society

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Common Name: Leopard Tortoise

Latin Name: *Geochelone pardalis*

Native to: Savannahs of Africa from Sudan to the southern Cape.

Size: Leopard tortoises are the fourth largest tortoises in the world and the second largest on Mainland Africa. They can reach carapace sizes of over two feet in length and weigh over 100 pounds. Most specimens usually only reach carapace lengths of 15 - 18 inches and weigh 30 – 50 pounds. Males are sometimes larger than females. Please keep this size in mind when purchasing or adopting a small juvenile or hatchling leopard tortoise because they will get larger and size is one of the reasons why these tortoises are offered for adoption.

Life span: Like all of the larger tortoise species, the leopard tortoise can live to 100 years or more.

General appearance: This tortoise has a yellowish or buff colored highly domed carapace with black blotches. Males have longer and thicker tails than females and have slightly concave plastrons.

Housing requirements:

Enclosure: Hatchling and juvenile leopard tortoises can be kept in larger aquariums or in mesh enclosures (such as Reptariums). As the tortoise gets larger a large custom built will be needed to adequately house this species. A pen size of about 10 feet by 10 feet in size for a medium sized tortoise. When possible, it is best for the tortoise to have an outdoor enclosure.

Temperature: Leopard tortoises require daytime temperatures of 70° - 90° F. Nighttime temperatures should be 70° - 75° F and should not drop below 60° F. This species should not be hibernated.

Heat/Light: When possible these tortoises do best in outdoor enclosures where they can take advantage of natural UVB light and heat from the sun. During colder months they will need to be setup in an indoor enclosure with heat and UVB light. Newer mercury vapor bulbs can provide both heat and UVB light in a single bulb. Fluorescent UVB bulbs can also be used for light. Additional heat can be provided with ceramic emitters, daytime basking bulbs, infrared heat bulbs and even under-tank heaters can be used. Under no circumstances should a heat rock should be used as they can cause serious burns to your tortoise.

Substrate: If kept in an outdoor pen then normal grasses can be used in the pen. Indoor enclosures can use a variety of substrates such as aspen shavings, compressed paper products (like Carefresh or CellSorb), newspaper or indoor/outdoor carpeting. Pine and cedar shavings should be avoided because they can cause long-term health issues.

Environment: Leopard tortoises come from a warmer and dryer part of the world and do not do well with high humidity or cooler temperatures. Because of this fact, these tortoises should never be hibernated.

Diet: This species requires a high fiber diet and should consist of 70% - 75% of grasses and hay. Use a variety of hays (timothy, alfalfa, orchard grass, etc.) to provide variety. Large amounts of lettuces and fruits should not be provided, though occasional small amounts are OK. The fruit and pads of the prickly pear (*Opuntia* sp.) are also enjoyed. Meat and other high protein items should be avoided as they lead to long-term health issues. Calcium and vitamin D3 supplements should be

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provided on a regular basis (two to three times per week depending on the diet being fed). Care should be taken not to over-supplement as this can cause health issues as well.

Maintenance: The enclosure should be spot cleaned daily. A thorough cleaning should be performed on a regular basis. A 5% bleach solution is an excellent disinfectant. Be sure to thoroughly rinse the enclosure before replacing the substrate and placing the tortoise back in the enclosure. It is always recommended to wash your hands thoroughly after handling the tortoise or cleaning the cage or cage accessories.

Other references or recommended reading:

- Heinen, Joseph E. "Leopard Tortoise: *Geochelone pardalis*." AfricanTortoise.com. Retrieved 16 December 2003. Available on-line: <<http://africantortoise.com/leopard.htm>>
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Retrieved 16 December 2003. Available on-line: <<http://www.reptilerope.org/caresheets.html>>
- Corton, Misty. "*Geochelone pardalis* (Leopard Tortoise) Care." The Tortoise Trust. Retrieved 16 December 2003. Available on-line: <<http://www.chelonia.org/Articles/Mistypardalis.htm>>
- Senneke, Darrell. "Leopard Tortoise – *Geochelone pardalis*." The Tortoise Trust. Retrieved 16 December 2003. Available on-line: <<http://www.chelonia.org/Articles/pardalis.htm>>