



Western New York Herpetological Society

www.wnyherp.org

Common Name: Russian Tortoise

Latin name: *Testudo horsfieldii*

Native to: Russia, Ukraine, Pakistan, and Western China

Size: 8" - 10"

Life span: Estimated to 100 years if proper care is given

General appearance: The Russian tortoise has highly developed claws with four toes per foot, which are used for digging. The carapace is rounded and has a stocky appearance. The shell is greenish to olive-brown in color with diffuse patches of dark brown or black color. There is no movable hinge on the plastron.

Housing requirements:

Enclosure: It is best to keep your tortoise outside where temperatures are not too extreme. If you live in an area where temperatures fall below 40° F your tortoises should be moved indoors. If you bring the tortoise indoors then a minimum of a 30-gallon enclosure is required.

Temperature: Temperatures should be kept at 70° - 80° F for day temperatures with a basking spot of 85° F. Night temperatures should be 65° - 75° F. Heat rocks are NOT recommended as burns may result from their use.

Heat/Light: It is important that adequate lighting is provided. Lighting must provide UVA and UVB for proper skeletal and shell development. Incandescent lights may be used to provide basking spots. Ceramic emitters or under-the-tank heaters may also be used to heat the enclosure

Substrate: Substrates such as Bed-a-Beast™, newspaper, aspen, indoor/outdoor carpeting and lizard litter are all adequate. You may wish to provide deeper substrate for your tortoise so that it may dig. It is important to remember that this species comes from arid climates and the humidity must be kept low. If the humidity is too high the tortoise can become prone to pneumonia, shell problems, as well as eye infections.

Environment: In the wild, these tortoises come from a fairly dry environment and often can be found along rocky hillsides with many places available for cover.

Diet: Russian tortoises require a high fiber, low protein, and calcium rich diet. Fruits should not be offered regularly since they contain high levels of sugar, which can create digestive problems. Do not feed high protein items since excessive protein may cause renal failure or impacted bladder stones which can result in the death of the tortoise. A mixture of edible grasses and clovers, hibiscus leaves and flowers, alfalfa and other grass hays, water cress, dandelion, rose leaves and petals, sow thistle, romaine lettuce, red leaf lettuce, endive, escarole, kale, cactus pods can be fed to your tortoise. If feeding lawn clippings or plants from the garden it is important to make sure that the surrounding area is not chemically treated. There are also commercially produced foods that can be used to supplement feedings, though it should not be the sole source of food.

Fresh water should be offered at all times. Your tortoise will also appreciate a 10-minute soak in a bath of tepid water. This will ensure proper hydration.

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This document is for guidance only and should not be used as the sole source of information. New information is being developed daily. It is recommended that a concerted effort be made to maintain up-to-date knowledge of the animals of interest.



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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 and cage accessories.

Other references or recommended reading:

Vidiherp Series "The Russian Tortoise" by A.C. Highfield