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TORTOISES AND TURTLES

Indian Star Tortoise

Geochelone elegans

Geochelone elegans is a medium-sized, diurnal tortoise from the dry regions of India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka. The tall, dark shell has yellow stars on each scute, and the female reaches about 30 cm. The species requires warmth, strong UVB, a high-fibre diet of grasses and herbs and a setup where humidity can be controlled; it is sensitive in captivity and assessed as Vulnerable in the wild.

Family: Testudinidae Former name: *Testudo elegans; Testudo stellata*

KEY FACTS

THE ANIMAL

Adult size	**15-30 cm** total length incl. tail
Weight	**1,000-6,600 g**
Lifespan	**25-80 years**
Active	**By day**
Lifestyle	**Terrestrial**
Habitat	**Semi-desert, savanna and dry forest**
Difficulty	**Experienced**

CARE

Min. enclosure	**240 × 120 × 50 cm** L × W × H for 2 adults
Temperature, day	**24-28 °C**
Basking spot	**35-40 °C**
Temperature, night	**20-22 °C**
Humidity	**40-75%**
Water	**Water dish**
UVB	**Essential** Ferguson zone 3
Diet	**Plants**
Kept	**Singly, in pairs or in groups**

BREEDING

Reproduction	**Egg-laying**
Sexually mature	**36-144 months**
Clutch size	**1-10 eggs**
Clutches per year	**1-9**
Incubation	**47-180 days** at 28-31 °C

PROTECTION AND PAPERWORK

CITES	**Appendix I**
EU annex	**Annex A**
IUCN	**Vulnerable (VU)**

Care at a glance

THE ENCLOSURE	*Geochelone elegans* should preferably be kept outdoors in summer, when the weather is warm, in a sunny enclosure with grass and drought-tolerant, edible herbs that the animal can graze.
TEMPERATURE	During the day the air should be 24-28 °C. Under a halogen lamp there should be a basking spot of 35-40 °C, measured at carapace height with a probe or an IR thermometer, so that the animal can warm up and then seek cooler places.
HUMIDITY AND WATER	Humidity should be 40-75 % in adults. Young animals need higher humidity, about 70-80 %, to grow evenly and not develop a lumpy shell; this is why they go into a closed enclosure for the first years.
LIGHTING AND UVB	*G. elegans* is diurnal and needs UVB to produce vitamin D3 and develop a strong skeleton. Outdoors in sun the animal gets it, but glass and Perspex stop UVB.
FEEDING	*G. elegans* is a herbivore, and the diet should be high in fibre and calcium and low in protein and sugar. In the wild it eats grasses, herbs, leaves, flowers and fallen fruit, and above all the fresh shoots in the rainy season.
BEHAVIOUR AND HANDLING	*G. elegans* is calm and shy and is most active in the morning and late in the afternoon.
NATIVE RANGE	India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka.