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TORTOISES AND TURTLES

Diamondback Terrapin

Malaclemys terrapin

Malaclemys terrapin is a small to medium-sized, diurnal turtle from the coastal marshes and brackish waters of North America. It is the only turtle in its range that lives in brackish water, and it is recognised by the rings on the scutes and the dark-spotted head and legs. The female grows to 23 cm and the male to about 14 cm. The species needs clean, preferably slightly salty water and is best suited to experienced keepers.

Family: Emydidae

KEY FACTS

THE ANIMAL

Adult size	**12-23 cm** total length incl. tail
Weight	**300-1,000 g**
Lifespan	**25-40 years**
Active	**By day**
Lifestyle	**Semi-aquatic**
Habitat	**Wetland**
Difficulty	**Experienced**

CARE

Min. enclosure	**120 × 60 × 65 cm** L × W × H for 1 adult
Temperature, day	**24-28 °C**
Basking spot	**32-35 °C**
Temperature, night	**22-25 °C**
Humidity	**50-80%**
Water	**Aquaterrarium** depth 35-40 cm
Water temperature	**24-27 °C**
UVB	**Essential** Ferguson zone 3
Diet	**Insects, complete diet, vertebrates and worms/snails**
Kept	**Singly or in groups**

BREEDING

Reproduction	**Egg-laying**
Sexually mature	**24-120 months**
Clutch size	**4-22 eggs**
Clutches per year	**1-3**
Incubation	**60-85 days** at 26-30 °C

PROTECTION AND PAPERWORK

CITES	**Appendix II**
EU annex	**Annex B**
IUCN	**Vulnerable (VU)**

Care at a glance

THE ENCLOSURE	Keep *Malaclemys terrapin* in an aquarium or tub, not in an ordinary terrarium. The tub must be at least five times as long as the shell and half as wide as it is long, with the basking area counted as part of the floor area.
TEMPERATURE	The water should be 24-27 °C for adults, about 28 °C for subadults and about 29 °C for newly hatched young. In an outdoor pond the water follows the season. The basking spot should be 32-35 °C, measured at the surface.
HUMIDITY AND WATER	Air humidity is not decisive; 50-80 % is sufficient. What is decisive is the purity of the water. If the water is the slightest bit dirty, the animal gets skin problems and shell rot.
WATER AND WATER QUALITY	The species lives in brackish water in the wild, and salinity is the most important choice in its care. Brackish water keeps the skin and shell healthy.
LIGHTING AND UVB	UVB is necessary for the bones, and the animal must have access to both UVA and UVB. The Ferguson zone has not been documented for the species; zone 3 is borrowed from *Graptemys pseudogeographica* and *Trachemys scripta*.
FEEDING	*Malaclemys terrapin* is a carnivore and eats in the water. In the wild it takes snails, mussels, crabs, fish and insects.
BEHAVIOUR AND HANDLING	*Malaclemys terrapin* is alert and gets used to its keeper, but is easily stressed. It flees in the water when disturbed and can injure itself on hard objects. It rarely bites.
NATIVE RANGE	United States and Bermuda.