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TORTOISES AND TURTLES

Russian Tortoise

Testudo horsfieldii

Testudo horsfieldii is a small, hardy steppe tortoise from Central Asia with four claws on each foot and a great talent for digging. The shell reaches 13-25 cm in length, and the species can live for 40-50 years. It does best in a large, dry enclosure with sun, outdoors in summer, and a cool hibernation.

Family: Testudinidae Former name: *Agrionemys horsfieldii; Agrionemys horsfieldi*

KEY FACTS

THE ANIMAL

Adult size	**13-25 cm** total length incl. tail
Lifespan	**40-50 years**
Active	**By day and at dusk**
Lifestyle	**Terrestrial and burrowing**
Habitat	**Desert and semi-desert**
Difficulty	**Intermediate**

CARE

Min. enclosure	**200 × 100 × 50 cm** L × W × H for 1 adult
Temperature, day	**24-29 °C**
Basking spot	**35-38 °C**
Temperature, night	**20-23 °C**
Humidity	**40-60%**
Water	**Water dish**
UVB	**Essential** Ferguson zone 3
Winter rest	**4-6 °C** 8-16 weeks
Diet	**Plants**
Kept	**Singly or in groups**

BREEDING

Reproduction	**Egg-laying**
Sexually mature	**120 months**
Clutch size	**2-6 eggs**
Clutches per year	**1-4**
Incubation	**60-75 days** at 30-31 °C

PROTECTION AND PAPERWORK

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

Care at a glance

THE ENCLOSURE	Floor area is what matters most, not height. A glass terrarium is not suitable: the air quickly becomes humid and stuffy, and there is no room to move.
TEMPERATURE	Indoors there must be a basking spot of 35-38 °C, a cool zone of 24-29 °C and 20-23 °C at night.
HUMIDITY AND WATER	The species is adapted to a dry climate, so the enclosure is kept dry and well drained, with a relative humidity of about 40-60 %.
WATER AND WATER QUALITY	There must always be a shallow, wide dish of fresh water, for example a plant saucer, sunk into the substrate so the animal can easily get in and out. The water must reach no higher than the animal's knees.
LIGHTING AND UVB	The species is diurnal and needs both strong light and UVB (Ferguson zone 3) all year indoors, with a UV index of about 3-4 at the basking spot.
FEEDING	*T. horsfieldii* is herbivorous and needs a high-fibre, low-protein and low-sugar diet.
BEHAVIOUR AND HANDLING	Tortoises seldom like being picked up, and the species is best for observing. Many can learn to enjoy a gentle scratch on the shell and to take food from the fingers.
NATIVE RANGE	Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Iran, Afghanistan, Pakistan and China.