herpy

LANDSCHILDPADDEN EN WATERSCHILDPADDEN

African Pancake Tortoise

Malacochersus tornieri

Malacochersus tornieri is a small East African tortoise with an unusually flat, thin and flexible shell. It lives on rocky hills in dry savanna and scrub, where it flees into narrow rock crevices instead of withdrawing into its shell. The shell is 15-18 cm long, the female lays only one egg at a time, and the species is critically endangered in the wild.

Familie: Testudinidae Vroegere naam: *Testudo tornieri; Testudo loveridgii*

KERNGEGEVENS

HET DIER

Volwassen grootte	**15-18 cm** totale lengte incl. staart
Levensduur	**20-30 jaar**
Actief	**Overdag**
Levenswijze	**Rotsbewonend**
Leefgebied	**Halfwoestijn, savanne en rotsachtig terrein**
Moeilijkheidsgraad	**Ervaren**

VERZORGING

Min. terrarium	**100 × 60 × 40 cm** L × B × H voor 1 volwassen dier
Temperatuur overdag	**24-28 °C**
Zonneplek	**32-35 °C**
Temperatuur ’s nachts	**18-22 °C**
Luchtvochtigheid	**30-50%**
Water	**Waterbak**
UVB	**Onmisbaar** Fergusonzone 2
Voeding	**Planten**
Gehouden	**Solitair of in paren**

KWEEK

Voortplanting	**Eierleggend**
Legselgrootte	**1 eieren**
Legsels per jaar	**1-4**
Incubatie	**120-185 dagen** bij 28-30 °C

BESCHERMING EN PAPIEREN

CITES	**Bijlage I**
EU-bijlage	**Bijlage A**
IUCN	**Ernstig bedreigd (CR)**

Over de soort

Malacochersus tornieri is a small tortoise and the only species in its genus. The shell (carapace) is 15-18 cm long, and it differs from that of all other tortoises: it is flat, thin and flexible, because the bony plates beneath the horny scutes have large openings. This makes the animal light and fast, but the shell offers little protection. In newly hatched young the shell is domed, as in other tortoises, and it only flattens out as the animal grows.

The carapace is light brown to yellowish brown, often with a dark, radiating pattern on each scute, and the plastron is pale yellow with dark seams. The head and limbs are yellowish brown. The legs are slender with strong claws, and the animal climbs quickly and surely. Females are slightly larger than males.

The species was described in 1903 and is named after the German zoologist Gustav Tornier. The genus name comes from the Greek words for soft and dry land. Pattern and colour vary greatly from animal to animal.

Verspreiding en leefgebied

Malacochersus tornieri lives in southern Kenya and in northern and eastern Tanzania. There are also small populations in northern Zambia, and the species has been reported from Malawi. It was described from Busisi on Lake Victoria in Tanzania. An introduced population probably exists in Zimbabwe.

Populations are scattered and isolated, because the species is found only where suitable rocky hills exist. It lives from the lowlands up to about 1,800 m above sea level. Since 1981 Kenya has required written permission for export, and because the species is listed on CITES Appendix I, wild-caught animals may not be traded commercially across borders. The animals in the trade are therefore captive-bred.

> **Natuurlijk verspreidingsgebied:** Kenia, Tanzania en Zambia.

LEEFGEBIED

Malacochersus tornieri lives on kopjes: isolated rocky hills and boulder piles in dry savanna and thorny scrub with acacias and *Commiphora*. The climate is semi-arid with a short rainy season and a long dry season, and the days are hot.

Its whole life is tied to the rock crevices. The animals emerge for only an hour or so at a time, mostly in the morning and late in the afternoon, to feed and warm up, and they rarely move far from their refuges. When threatened they run to the nearest crevice, squeeze in and wedge themselves there, probably by pressing the back against the roof and inflating the body with air, so that they can hardly be pulled out. Several animals often share the same crevice. In the hottest months they may aestivate under flat stones, but they do not hibernate. The diet consists of dry grasses, herbs and succulents such as aloe, and they take fallen fruit if they find it. The female lays her egg in loose, sandy soil, mostly in July and August.

Verzorging

HET TERRARIUM

Little detailed knowledge exists on the care of *Malacochersus tornieri*, and wild-caught animals are very difficult to acclimatise to captivity. Temperature, humidity, UVB and incubation are therefore based partly on the habitat and partly on other tortoises from dry regions.

The terrarium must provide room for movement and climbing, and the most important feature of the set-up is rock crevices. An animal of 15-18 cm needs at least 100 × 60 × 40 cm, and a pair at least 120 × 60 × 40 cm. Build stable stacks of flat stones and slate slabs so that crevices form which the animal can squeeze into, and make sure the stacks cannot topple. Crevices that are too wide are not used, and crevices that are too narrow can trap the animal. Keep the gap between the slabs to a few centimetres, and make several crevices so that the animals can each go their own way.

The substrate is a dry mix of sand, soil and gravel, 5-10 cm deep. The terrarium should be open at the top or well ventilated, because the species is kept dry. Put an opaque strip along the front of the glass so that the animal does not try to climb up the pane. The animal is a skilled climber, so all edges and lids must be secured. On warm summer days it benefits from an outdoor enclosure with rock stacks, dry plants and shade, but it must be indoors at night.

Lees meer: Licht en UVB

TEMPERATUUR

By day the temperature should be 24-28 °C, and at night 18-22 °C. The species prefers lower temperatures than many other tortoises and does not spend long in the sun, but a local hot spot of 32-35 °C lets it warm up when it wants to. Use a radiant heat lamp with a thermostat at one end, and place shelters in shade at the cool end, so that the animal can choose for itself.

The species does not hibernate and must be kept warm all year.

LUCHTVOCHTIGHEID EN WATER

Humidity should be low, 30-50 %. The terrarium should be dry, but a small dish of clean drinking water must always be available. Change the water daily. A shelter in one of the rock stacks can be lightly misted now and then, so that there is a more humid microclimate to retreat into. The substrate must dry out again afterwards, because persistent damp causes respiratory infections and shell problems.

Young animals dry out more easily than adults and can be given a short bath in lukewarm, shallow water once or twice a week.

VERLICHTING EN UVB

Malacochersus tornieri is diurnal and is most active early and late in the day. UVB is necessary when the animal is kept indoors: Ferguson zone 2, corresponding to a UV index of 2.0-3.0 in part of the terrarium. The shelters must be positioned so that the animal can withdraw from the light when it wants to. The lighting follows the seasons, with 12 hours a day. Glass and acrylic block UVB, and a UVB tube loses strength over time and should be replaced according to the manufacturer's instructions.

VOEDING

The diet is dry and high in fibre. Offer dry grasses, hay and wild herbs such as dandelion, clover and vetch, and include succulents such as aloe and stonecrop. Dark green salad leaves can be used, and fruit is only an occasional treat in small amounts. Insects and other animal food are not necessary.

Dust the food with a calcium supplement, and leave a cuttlebone available. Both adults and young are fed daily in small amounts. Too much protein and too much fruit cause overly rapid growth and a deformed shell. The shell is soft and thin, so plenty of calcium and UVB are especially important.

Lees meer: Calcium, vitaminen en supplementen

GEDRAG EN OMGANG

Malacochersus tornieri is shy, but active and persistent. It climbs, hides and comes out only when things are quiet. It does not withdraw into its shell, but runs towards the nearest crevice and squeezes in when disturbed. The shell is soft and thin, so the animal must never be lifted by the shell with a hard grip, and it should be handled as little as possible. Lift it gently under the belly with both hands, and do not let it fall.

In the wild the animals live together in crevices and tolerate each other. In the terrarium one male and one female can be kept together, but males can injure each other seriously, especially when there is only one female, so two males must not be kept together. If there are several animals, there must be many crevices, and if there are signs of bullying, the animals must be separated.

Kweek

GESLACHTSRIJPHEID EN GESLACHTSONDERSCHEID

The female is slightly larger than the male. Sex is hard to see in young animals. Age and size at sexual maturity are not documented, and the lifespan of 20-30 years is an estimate based on other small tortoises.

PARING

The mating season in the wild is January-February, but animals in captivity can breed all year. Males fight over females, and the male bites at the female's legs before mounting her. Give the female plenty of hiding places and the chance to get away, and separate the animals if she is injured. Further details on mating are not documented.

EILEG EN LEGSELS

The female lays only one elongated egg at a time. She can lay several eggs during a season at intervals of four to eight weeks, but the total number per year is not documented; 1-4 is an estimate. She digs a nest of about 10 cm in loose, sandy soil, so give her a box of deep, dry sand and soil.

INCUBATIE

The incubation period is 4-6 months, around 185 days at low humidity. The egg is incubated at 28-30 °C in an incubator with dry to slightly moist vermiculite, and it must not be turned. Sex depends on the incubation temperature, but the threshold between males and females is not known for the species.

OPFOK VAN DE JONGEN

The hatchlings are 3-5 cm long and independent from the first day. The shell is domed at hatching and only flattens out with growth. Give them the same set-up as adults, with shelters and rock crevices, and feed them daily with dry herbs and grasses. Further rearing data are not documented.

Gezondheid en veelgemaakte fouten

Wild-caught animals are often in poor condition, and the species is difficult to acclimatise to captivity. The shell is soft and thin and can be damaged by pressure, falls and too hard a grip.

- Shell damage and deformities: too rapid growth, too much protein and fruit, and too little calcium and UVB.
- Respiratory infection: runny nose and wheezy breathing in cold and persistent damp.
- Dehydration: especially in young animals, with lethargy and sunken eyes.
- Parasites: new animals should be checked with faecal samples.

Contact a vet with reptile experience if the animal is not eating, is losing weight or has loose droppings. New animals must be quarantined before they are put together with other tortoises.

Vraag altijd raad aan iemand die er verstand van heeft

Deze gids is een goed beginpunt, maar kan ervaring niet vervangen. Dieren verschillen, en veel van wat er echt toe doet, leer je van mensen die de soort al jaren houden. Praat met een kweker, een ervaren houder of een dierenarts die reptielen en amfibieën kent voordat je het dier haalt - en opnieuw als er iets niet pluis lijkt.

De volledige gids met kaart en updates: herpy.org/en/tortoises-and-turtles/malacochersus-tornieri