herpy

TORTOISES AND TURTLES

## African Spurred Tortoise

# *Centrochelys sulcata*

*Centrochelys sulcata* is the largest tortoise on the African mainland: the shell reaches 50-85 cm, the weight up to 90 kg, and the animal can live for 50-80 years. The young are small but grow fast, and adults require a heated room of more than 20 m² in winter, a large outdoor enclosure in summer and a keeper who can carry the responsibility for decades.

Family: Testudinidae  Former name: *Geochelone sulcata; Testudo sulcata*  Published 16 November 2026

KEY FACTS

### THE ANIMAL

| | |
|---|---|
| Adult size | **50-85 cm**<br>total length incl. tail |
| Weight | **30,000-90,000 g** |
| Lifespan | **50-80 years** |
| Active | **By day and at dusk** |
| Lifestyle | **Terrestrial and burrowing** |
| Habitat | **Semi-desert and savanna** |
| Difficulty | **Experienced** |

### CARE

| | |
|---|---|
| Min. enclosure | **640 × 320 × 120 cm**<br>L × W × H for 1 adult |
| Temperature, day | **24-32 °C** |
| Basking spot | **38-41 °C** |
| Temperature, night | **21-23 °C** |
| Humidity | **40-80%** |
| Water | **Water dish** |
| UVB | **Essential**<br>Ferguson zone 4 |
| Diet | **Plants** |
| Kept | **Singly or in groups** |

### BREEDING

| | |
|---|---|
| Reproduction | **Egg-laying** |
| Sexually mature | **120-180 months** |
| Clutch size | **15-40 eggs** |
| Clutches per year | **2-3** |
| Incubation | **90-120 days**<br>at 30-31 °C |

### PROTECTION AND PAPERWORK

| | |
|---|---|
| CITES | **Appendix II** |
| EU annex | **Annex B** |
| IUCN | **Endangered (EN)** |

## Care at a glance

| | |
|---|---|
| **THE ENCLOSURE** | Space is the first thing to settle. A common minimum rule for tortoises is a length of 8 times and a width of 4 times the shell length of the largest animal. |
| **TEMPERATURE** | The air temperature should be 24-32 °C by day, with a basking spot of 38-41 °C for young animals, and 21-23 °C at night. |
| **HUMIDITY AND WATER** | Although the species comes from a dry area, young animals must not be kept completely dry: in the wild the young hatch in the rainy season and spend much time in humid burrows. |
| **WATER AND WATER QUALITY** | There must always be a large, low and stable bowl of fresh water, dug in so that the animal can 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 4) all year indoors, with a UV index of about 4-6 at the basking spot. |
| **FEEDING** | *C. sulcata* is a herbivore and needs a high-fibre, low-protein diet. |
| **BEHAVIOUR AND HANDLING** | The species is calm and sluggish, but not a pet for handling. The animal is stressed by being lifted, and an adult of 50-90 kg cannot be lifted by one person. Many take food from the hand and enjoy having the shell scratched. |
| **NATIVE RANGE** | Ethiopia, Eritrea, Sudan, South Sudan, Chad, Niger, Mali, Mauritania, Senegal, Central African Republic and Cameroon. |

The full guide with map and updates: herpy.org/skildpadder/centrochelys-sulcata