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TORTOISES AND TURTLES

River Cooter

Pseudemys concinna

Pseudemys concinna is a large, diurnal freshwater turtle from rivers and lakes in the eastern and central USA, with a flat shell decorated with yellow whorls. The shell can exceed 40 cm, and the animal can live for several decades. An adult needs a very large, filtered tank holding several hundred litres of water, a warm basking spot, strong UVB and a mainly plant-based diet.

Family: Emydidae Published 16 November 2026

KEY FACTS

THE ANIMAL

Adult size	**22-44 cm** total length incl. tail
Lifespan	**20-44 years**
Active	**By day**
Lifestyle	**Semi-aquatic**
Habitat	**Wetland**
Difficulty	**Experienced**

CARE

Min. enclosure	**200 × 80 × 70 cm** L × W × H for 1 adult
Temperature, day	**21-31 °C**
Basking spot	**30-40 °C**
Temperature, night	**20-24 °C**
Humidity	**50-80%**
Water	**Aquaterrarium** depth 30-45 cm
Water temperature	**21-31 °C**
UVB	**Essential** Ferguson zone 3
Diet	**Insects, complete diet, plants and worms/snails**
Kept	**Singly**

BREEDING

Reproduction	**Egg-laying**
Clutch size	**10-20 eggs**
Clutches per year	**1-6**
Incubation	**80-150 days** at 26-30 °C

PROTECTION AND PAPERWORK

CITES	**Not listed**
EU annex	**Not listed**
IUCN	**Least Concern (LC)**

Care at a glance

THE ENCLOSURE	Keep the animal in a large aquarium, a tank or a closed indoor pond, not in an ordinary enclosure.
TEMPERATURE	The surface of the basking spot must be about 40 °C, measured with an infrared thermometer a couple of hours after the lamps are switched on, and the air above it 30-32 °C.
HUMIDITY AND WATER	The turtle's humidity is the water itself, so the relative humidity of the air is not precisely documented for the species and is not decisive; 50-80 % in the room is ample. What matters is the cleanliness of the water.
WATER AND WATER QUALITY	The water is the animal's living space, so it must be deep, clean and warm. The water depth must at least equal the shell length, and 30-45 cm suits adults. The temperature is 21-31 °C for adults (see Temperature).
LIGHTING AND UVB	UVB is a necessity. The species is diurnal, basks a great deal and belongs to Ferguson zone 3. The UV index at the surface of the basking spot must be 3.0-4.0 and lower elsewhere in the setup, so the animal can choose.
FEEDING	In the wild *P. concinna* eats mostly aquatic plants, grass and algae and also takes plants at the water's edge and fallen fruit; it has tooth-like points in the upper jaw that help it tear through fibrous leaves.
BEHAVIOUR AND HANDLING	*P. concinna* is diurnal and very shy: at the slightest movement or sound it slips from the basking spot into the water. It does not like being handled and should be lifted only when necessary.
NATIVE RANGE	United States.