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TORTOISES AND TURTLES

Common Musk Turtle

Sternotherus odoratus

Sternotherus odoratus is a small, almost entirely aquatic turtle from eastern North America. The shell grows to only 8-13 cm, but the animal can live for many decades. The species is most active at dusk and at night, is a poor swimmer and needs a filtered tank with relatively shallow water, a hot lamp and UVB. When it feels threatened, it releases a foul-smelling fluid.

Family: Kinosternidae Former name: *Kinosternon odoratum* Published 16 November 2026

KEY FACTS

THE ANIMAL

Adult size	**8-13 cm** total length incl. tail
Lifespan	**20-50 years**
Active	**At dusk and at night**
Lifestyle	**Aquatic**
Habitat	**Wetland**
Difficulty	**Beginner**

CARE

Min. enclosure	**120 × 50 × 45 cm** L × W × H for 1 adult
Temperature, day	**24-29 °C**
Basking spot	**30-35 °C**
Temperature, night	**20-24 °C**
Humidity	**50-80%**
Water	**Aquaterrarium** depth 15-25 cm
Water temperature	**22-26 °C**
UVB	**Essential** Ferguson zone 2
Diet	**Insects, complete diet, plants, vertebrates and worms/snails**
Kept	**Singly or in pairs**

BREEDING

Reproduction	**Egg-laying**
Sexually mature	**48-120 months**
Clutch size	**1-6 eggs**
Clutches per year	**1-4**
Incubation	**60-86 days** at 25-28 °C

PROTECTION AND PAPERWORK

CITES	**Appendix II**
EU annex	**Annex B**
IUCN	**Least Concern (LC)**

Care at a glance

THE ENCLOSURE	Keep the animal in an aquarium or a shallow tank, not in an ordinary terrarium. There must be at least about 15 litres of water per cm of shell length, so an adult animal of 10-13 cm needs 150-195 litres of water.
TEMPERATURE	The water should be 22-26 °C, and a water heater is normally necessary. Avoid heating cables or heat mats under the tank, because the animal walks along the bottom and can burn itself. Place the water heater behind a plastic guard.
HUMIDITY AND WATER	The turtle's humidity is the water itself, so the relative humidity of the air is not decisive and is not documented in more detail for the species; 50-80 % in the room is ample.
WATER AND WATER QUALITY	The water is the animal's living space. The water depth is 15-25 cm for adult animals and lower for juveniles, with shallower areas where the animal can rest.
LIGHTING AND UVB	UVB is necessary for the animal to produce vitamin D3 and absorb calcium. Even if the animal does not always come out of the water, there must be a basking spot with a lamp so that it can choose.
FEEDING	*Sternotherus odoratus* is omnivorous but mainly carnivorous.
BEHAVIOUR AND HANDLING	*Sternotherus odoratus* is shy and walks mostly along the bottom. It is not an animal to pick up: it can bite with its long, mobile neck and release a foul-smelling fluid.
NATIVE RANGE	United States and Canada.