

## **TORTOISE HIBERNATION – LARDER FRIDGE ALERT**

Hibernation of tortoises in a larder fridge has been advocated for some years now, but there were a number of tragic losses last winter using this method. To ensure safe hibernation, here are some basic tips for owners.

- The ideal fridge is one where ice never forms, such as a wine cooler. A larder fridge without an ice box is not necessarily safe, as beads of ice can still form on the back wall of the fridge.
- Set up your fridge at least a month before putting your tortoise in and use a thermometer to monitor the temperature regularly until you are certain it has settled at around 5°C.
- When ready to hibernate, place the tortoise in a box with a suitable substrate or wrap it loosely in a towel. This will help absorb any moisture from condensation which could cause mould to appear on the animal.
- Place the tortoise away from the back of the fridge and not too close to the integral light. Take care in fridges with a metal plate at the back which may be close to freezing point.
- Make sure of an exchange of air by opening the fridge door daily because fridge doors close using a vacuum seal and often have no fan. Do not use this method if you plan to be away from home during the hibernation period.
- Weigh your tortoise on a regular basis. Drastic loss of weight or urination means something is wrong and the animal should be brought out of hibernation.
- The fridge method is not recommended for older animals that have been successfully hibernated by traditional methods for many years, nor for very young animals. It may also be unsuitable for Horsfield tortoises that have a strong burrowing instinct and need a deep box.