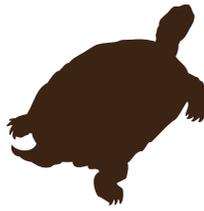


CARE SHEET



BCG

BRITISH CHELONIA GROUP

PATRON: PROFESSOR DAVID J. BELLAMY OBE

THE LEOPARD TORTOISE

(Stigmochelys [Geochelone] pardalis)



You can obtain further information on tortoise and terrapin care by consulting our website: www.britishcheloniagroup.org.uk or by writing to:

THE BRITISH CHELONIA GROUP,
Membership and General Enquiries
P.O. Box 16216, Tamworth, Staffs. B77 9LA.

Please enclose an SAE

For tortoise, terrapin and turtle care and conservation.

Company Limited by Guarantee (England and Wales) No. 07541800. Registered Charity No. 1140830
The British Chelonia Group. Registered Office: New Barn Farmhouse, Toft Road, Kingston, Cambs. CB23 2NS
www.britishcheloniagroup.org.uk

HABITAT: Savanna and semi-desert with dry forest or grassland vegetation.

SUBSPECIES: Two are unofficially recognised.

1. The Eastern Leopard Tortoise (*Stigmochelys pardalis babcocki*).

RANGE: Eastern Africa from Abyssinia to the Republic of South Africa, except western Republic of South Africa and southern Namibia.

2. The Western Leopard Tortoise (*Stigmochelys pardalis pardalis*).

RANGE: Western Republic of South Africa and southern Namibia.

FEATURES: The carapace is highly domed and contoured, with black splashes over a yellow background, resembling a leopard's skin pattern. The head and limbs are a dull yellow; the forelimbs have a series of heavy protective scales and on the female the scales on the heels of the back legs are enlarged to form digging claws. The animal has two or three horny tubercles on the thighs in addition to a horny pin on the tail. It can weigh up to 50 kilos, but averages 10-15kg and may have a carapace length (measured as a horizontal line) of 600mm. During courtship males compete by pushing and butting rivals; husky cries are uttered by the male during copulation. Clutches of 5 to 30 eggs are laid in nests dug by the female, sometimes in instalments. Hatching time under low humidity is long; from 4 to 18 months have been recorded. The animals are very territorial and are recorded to have a homing instinct. The Western Leopard Tortoise is slightly smaller and darker coloured than the eastern variety.

FEEDING:

Native: grass, various succulents, crassulas, thistles, prickly pear, pumpkins, beans, watermelons and occasional mushrooms. Mammalian faeces, bones and even carrion may be eaten opportunistically.

Captive: the Leopard Tortoise is mainly vegetarian and prefers green vegetables to fruits but some will occasionally eat animal protein. The babies and juveniles will need a calcium rich diet (such as watercress supplemented with Nutrobal) and need roughage in the diet (e.g. grass, vegetable stalks).

The following foods can be tried: **vegetables** - green beans, broccoli, cabbage, cauliflower, carrots, cucumber, clover, dandelion, endives, grass, lettuce, kale, sprouts of the pulses.

Fruits - feed sparingly and limit to once weekly. Try apricots, bananas, blackberries, dates, figs, gooseberries, mandarins, mango, passionfruit, peach, pineapple, plum, orange, paupau, tomato and watermelon. Offer cuttlefish bone or other calcium-rich supplements.

HUSBANDRY HINTS FOR CAPTIVE LEOPARD TORTOISES IN BRITAIN.

The Leopard Tortoise needs exercise and whenever the weather allows, must be given the freedom of a large lawn where it will be able to crop the grass. Water should be available at all times; some of the animals actually enjoy swimming. This tortoise loves heat and basking, although shade should be provided as well as a waterproof shelter. A heated greenhouse is ideal for this type of tortoise. It can stand extremes of temperature, although it should not drop below 18°C (65°F) for too long as then the digestive system might suffer. Access to natural sunlight is essential for prevention of shell and eye disorders. Hatchlings and juveniles should be kept in a large roomy vivarium, preferably in a thermostatically controlled environment of 21-27°C (70-80°F) with a UV lamp. The animals are voracious feeders but bear in mind they would not have constant access to lush fruit and vegetables in the wild. Depending on the region they come from some of the Leopard Tortoises do aestivate in their natural habitat between May and November. It is unwise to try to imitate this and in Britain the animals should not be hibernated or aestivated but overwintered in a suitable environment.

Reviewed January 2017