



Turtle Care sheet

Murray river short neck and eastern long neck both these species of turtles do not require a licence.

INTRODUCTION

Turtles are one of the most appealing animals of the reptile world. There are no 'effort free' animals to keep as pets, and turtles are no exception. Along with the pleasure of owning a turtle comes the responsibility to provide the best possible care for it that you can. Their survival is in your hands! If basic guidelines are followed, then your turtle should thrive in captivity. Turtles are renowned for their longevity and may live for up to thirty years. Most Australian freshwater turtles are very timid and shy, but within time will lose their fear and become accustomed to you and will recognise where their food comes from. There are many stories of keepers being amused while watching a turtles' antics in their aquatic enclosures, and some go as far to say that they each have their own recognisable personalities.

There is NO such thing as a 'Penny turtle' in Australia. This was merely a generalised term given to at least four species of turtle hatchlings including the Mary River turtle, the Saw-shelled turtle and the Southern-snapping turtle that were sold in pet shops and department stores in the 70's. The poor husbandry advice given most often led to the turtle becoming 'stunted' or even dying.

Turtle husbandry

Set up requirements

Your turtle set up should be a minimum size of 2 foot for a juvenile turtle .The setup needs to include a heater which should be set to 22-24 degrees for eastern longnecks and 24-26 degrees for Murray river short necks .A filter that should run the volume of the tank 4 to 5 times an hour. A UV light needs to be supplied to help the turtles growth and development. Your turtle should be kept under 5.0 - 10.0 UV light (depending on tank height). The light should be on for about 8-10 hours a day.

Turtles are a mainly aquatic animal but a require a form of land for basking. If you find your turtle is not coming out of the water a low wattage basking lamp can be beneficial as it helps to dry their shell out and stimulates natural basking behaviour. It is important to make sure that the basking lamp is not too hot so a 25-40w globe is

usually best and should be on for approximately 8 hours (**the basking lamp is an optional feature of your turtle setup**) we also recommend some form of hiding spot in the tank e.g. a fake plant.

Cycling your tank

We recommend you cycle your tank before the introduction of your turtle (please refer to last page for more information)

Cleaning

We recommend that you change one quarter of the water in the tank once a week for baby turtles. If the tank has gravel a gravel vacuum/syphon will need to be used when doing a water change to remove any waste from the gravel. When changing the water two different water conditioners must be used. The liquid conditioner is used to remove chlorine from the water and the salt conditioner to raise the hardness level and add calcium. The use of a biological additive will help replenish the good bacteria in the water to maintain a stable environment. We advise you to use a turtle neutralizing block to help maintain water conditions and add calcium and a anti-fungus block to help prevent your turtle from getting fungus as it is one of the most common problem that occurs with baby turtles. Filter maintenance should be done every 4-6 weeks, the media of the filter should be removed and rinsed in a bucket of old tank water **NEVER TAP WATER**, if the filter media is cleaned in tap water it kills the good beneficial bacteria the builds up on the filter.

Water testing

When keeping any aquarium we highly recommend you purchase a complete water testing kit, which contains ammonia, nitrite, nitrate, general hardness and ph testers. When starting a brand new aquarium you should test all of these frequently until your cycle is complete. After the cycle is complete you should be testing your ph and nitrate and general hardness weekly as nitrate indicates waste levels in the water and if they are high more water changing needs to be done. Monthly you should test ammonia and nitrite as well. Not testing the water may result in illness or death if the optimal conditions are not provided for your turtle.

The following levels are what you should be aiming to achieve:

PH: 7.6

Nitrate: 0-5ppm

General Hardness: 250ppm - 280ppm.

Nitrite: 0ppm

Ammonia: 0ppm

Feeding

Your turtle should be feed once a day 5 days a week a day for the first year and only small amounts. As your turtle grows you can increase the amount fed. As it gets

older decrease feeding to 3 or 4 times a week. Turtles should be fed in a separate containers filled with enough of their own tank water that they can swim in. This helps prevent excess waste in the tank and turtles can be left in this container for up to an hour. It may take a while for your turtle to get into the habit of eating these types of food so you may need to leave the food in for a little longer at the start. A variety of foods are recommended such as frozen bloodworms, frozen turtle dinner, frozen baby turtle dinner and dry turtle pellets. A great source of live food for your baby turtle is small live fish, yabbies and shrimp as they are the most natural and least polluting of all food types.

Drying your turtle

As baby turtles can be a very shy and timid they may not leave the water enough to dry there shell out properly which can lead to problems such as soft shell. Turtles should be dried approximately once a week for 6-8 hours in a small box with shredded paper and air holes. Make sure to have a lid on your box as they can climb and may escape .

Disorders and illness

SHELL ROT--This condition can be caused by even a small scratch or bite, which allows bacteria or pathogens entry to soft tissue under the scutes. Carefully remove all dead tissue and clean affected area with *Betadine* solution and a stiff brush, thoroughly rinse with water, then allow the area to "dry out" and fresh air to circulate around the wound. Isolation is recommended as shell rot is highly aggressive and contagious and can be passed on to other turtles. Thoroughly rinse the turtle under running water before returning to the aquarium as residual antiseptic will destroy important nitrifying bacteria in your filtration system. Some of the symptoms of shell rot include: 1.Pitting in the shell on or just below the surface. 2. Soft areas on the shell (especially on the plastron) that are yellow or cream in colour and often have a pungent odour. 3. Areas where scutes have lifted or fallen off exposing bony plates that have live or necrotic tissue underneath. 4. A build up of reddish fluid visible under the scutes. Consult your reptile veterinarian, as a course of antibiotics may be required.

SOFT SHELL--This condition is unfortunately common amongst young turtles kept indoors, and can lead to their death. All neonates have soft shells upon hatching and will usually begin to harden within two weeks. If calcium and uv are not available then the hardening of the shell may not eventuate. Drying the turtle out in a box with newspaper for approximately 8hours a day everyday then returning the turtle to its tank, continue this treatment until shell has rehardened. Offering a variety of good quality food may help the treatment of soft shell and may also prevent it from occurring . Adding a controlled source of *Calgrit* or coral sand to your aquarium will also benefit them.

BACTERIAL AND FUNGAL SKIN INFECTIONS--This complaint mainly affects turtles that are housed indoors and three predisposing factors can be lack of uv, incorrect water pH and dirty water. More often than not skin infections start with bacteria and may or may not become infected secondarily by fungus. The first indication of skin infection will be the appearance of grey, white, or yellow patches on the skin. If the infection is not treated quickly, it will eventually spread over the entire body and may cause death as rapidly as within three to five days. Treat the infected areas with **Betadine**® ointment and keep the turtle out of the water for approximately two hours before returning it to the water. Thoroughly rinse the turtle under running water before returning to the aquarium, as residual antiseptic will destroy important nitrifying bacteria in your filtration system. **Avoid contact with the turtle's eyes.** Repeat this procedure 3 times a day for two to three days. If symptoms persist, it is recommended making a small dip of water and broad-spectrum aquarium remedy, in a separate container to the manufacturer's recommended dosage. Place the infected turtle in the solution for one hour, remove and allow your turtle to dry out for approximately 2 hours, and then return it to the aquarium. If symptoms show no sign of improving see a qualified veterinarian.

RESPIRATORY INFECTION AND PNEUMONIA

Turtles kept in continuously cold or draughty conditions may develop a respiratory infection. Some indications of this condition are loss of appetite, discharge from the nose in the form of bubbles, drooping of the head, and wheezing. This condition can be fatal if not detected in its early stages. Outdoor ponds should receive morning and afternoon sun to allow turtles to bask and achieve a preferred body temperature. Indoor aquariums should be heated and have a constant temperature of between 24°C and 27°C. Do not place aquariums in front of open windows. A course of antibiotics may be needed, contact a qualified veterinarian. Vitamin and fluid therapy may also be necessary. A **vitamin A** deficiency can be a predisposing factor.

Murray river short neck eastern long neck comparison

Eastern longneck

Size –male carapace length 210mm average, female carapace length 260mm average

Temperament- eastern long necks are very friendly and interactive turtle once they settle in their new home.

Diet- eastern long necks are predominantly a carnivorous turtle and mainly feed on fish, yabbies, worms and frozen turtle foods.

Murray river short neck

Size- Murray River short necks tend to grow faster than eastern longneck turtles. Male carapace length 270mm average, female carapace length 300mm average

Temperament – Murray River short necks can be more aggressive towards other turtles and are normally less outgoing than eastern longneck, but with time can become very friendly and interactive.

Diet- Murray River short necks are omnivores and will eat a mix of fish, yabbies, worms, frozen turtle foods, live plants and pellets.

Health guarantee

Mentone aquarium offer a 7 day health guarantee on all turtles sold, after this period of time we cannot be held responsible for the care of your turtle or aquarium. However if you have any questions or queries regarding your turtle we are happy to help in anyway possible.

This information is given only as a guide*

We strongly recommend you complete this process before buying a turtle!

The Nitrogen Cycle

Every newly set up aquarium goes through a process of establishing beneficial bacterial colonies. This is called the Nitrogen cycle. Failure to understand this process is the largest contributing factor to the loss of aquarium livestock. Unlike nature, an aquarium is a closed environment. All wastes excreted from the livestock, uneaten food, and decaying plants stay inside the tank.

For a short period of time, a new aquarium becomes a toxic environment. The water may look clear, but don't be fooled! It's loaded with toxins. Beneficial bacterial colonies capable of converting wastes to safer by-products begin growing in the tank as soon as livestock is introduced. Unfortunately there isn't enough bacteria to eliminate all the toxins immediately, so for a period of several weeks or more, aquarium livestock is at great risk.

However, by understanding how the nitrogen cycle works and knowing the proper steps to take, you can get through this period with few problems.

There are three stages of the nitrogen cycle (refer to diagram on following page).

Initial stage: The cycle begins when turtles or fish are introduced to the aquarium. Their feces, urine, as well as any uneaten food, are quickly broken down into ammonia. Ammonia usually begins rising by the third day and is highly toxic to aquarium livestock. It's only during the cycling of a tank that ammonia should be present.

Second stage: During this stage Nitrosomonas bacteria begin to oxidize the ammonia, thus eliminating it. However, the by-product of ammonia oxidation is nitrite, which is also highly toxic to aquarium livestock. Nitrite usually begins rising by the end of the first week. Future ammonia and/or nitrite spikes would be due to excess waste accumulating within the tank and/or damaged bacterial colonies. If you do incur ammonia or nitrite spikes the most effective way of reducing these toxins is to perform regular partial water changes.

Third stage: In the last stage of the cycle, Nitrobacter bacteria convert the nitrites into nitrates. Nitrates are not highly toxic to aquarium livestock in low to moderate levels. Routine partial water changes will keep the nitrate levels within the safe range. Established tanks should be tested for nitrates frequently to ensure that levels are not becoming too high.

