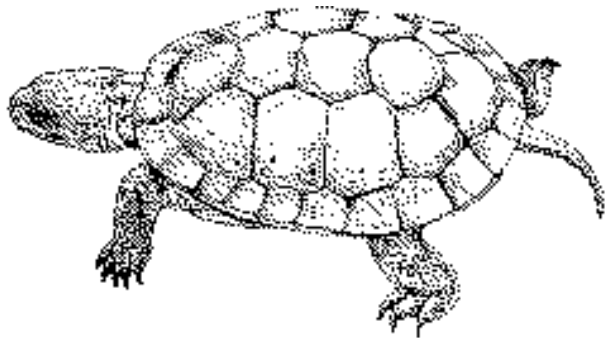


# Elands Veterinary Clinic.

## CLIENT INFORMATION SHEET.

### EXOTIC PETS (Mediterranean Tortoises) (Testudo spp)



#### Elands Veterinary Clinic.

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**E**lands Veterinary Clinic has a special interest in tortoises and Mr. Stephen Divers MRCVS is the current veterinary liaison officer for the British Chelonia Group. There are many species of tortoises kept as pets including the Mediterranean species, red and yellow-foot, leopard, Sulcata and many more. This care sheet is specific for the commoner Hermann's and Spur-thighed species.

#### HOUSING.

Tortoises are ectothermic and rely on an external heat source to function efficiently. They are inactive in cold weather and hibernate below 15 C. Tortoises prefer large garden enclosures over vivaria. It is essential that any enclosure is escape-proof. A well ventilated greenhouse with access to a walled garden and paved area is ideal. Tortoises must have an entry/exit to escape from the greenhouse in hot weather. A waterproof house in a sunny position is essential to protect the tortoise from extremes of cold, wet and heat. For larger collections, it is advisable to separate the males and females as males often engage in aggressive female shell-butting and leg biting as part of the courtship. Any tortoise which is underweight or diseased should not be hibernated, but maintained in a vivarium. The vivarium should have an overhead ceramic heat source and full spectrum light source providing a 12-14 hour light photo period. The temperatures should be 25-28 C by day with a daytime basking area of 28-30C. At night the temperature should fall to 18-22 C. Newspaper is used to line the floor while shredded paper and cardboard can be provided for retreats. Fresh food and water should be provided daily. Never expose to temperature below 15 C as hibernation may occur.

#### NUTRITION.

Tortoises do drink, especially on waking from hibernation when a warm shallow bath is usually appreciated. An easily accessible, shallow dish about 10 cm deep should be sunk into the ground. These animals are herbivores. A tortoise that has the run of a garden will forage for itself on a variety of plants. Beware of poisonous weedkillers and slug pellets. The diet should be as varied as possible and a proprietary reptile vitamin/high calcium supplement such as **Nutrobal** (Vet-Ark) should be used and is available from reception. The diet should consist of 75% green leafy vegetables, 15% grated root vegetables, and 10% fruit using the following; beans (leaves and pods), broccoli, brussels sprouts, cabbage, cauliflower, cucumber, endive, lettuce, kale, spring greens, watercress, beetroot, carrots, cauliflower, parsnips, sprouted chick peas and lentils, apples, apricots, blackberries, currants, gooseberries, grapes, mandarins, figs, blackberries, melons, peaches, pears, plums, oranges, raspberries, strawberries and tomatoes. Frozen/tinned vegetables/fruits may be offered in an emergency. High protein items like dog and cat foods should be avoided.

#### HIBERNATION.

During August and September tortoises prepare for hibernation. Feeding declines and starvation for 4-6 weeks prior to hibernation is essential. Before this period of anorexia starts, usually in September, a routine veterinary examination and worming should be performed. Any disease problems must be corrected prior to hibernation. Ensure that the Jackson weight:length ratios for tortoises scheduled for hibernation are acceptable. For hibernation use a large, wooden, rodent-proof tea-chest or box, with small air holes in the sides. Both the top and the holes should be covered with wire mesh to prevent vermin entering. Line the base and the sides of the box with polystyrene or newspaper. Place the tortoise in an inner box with air holes and filled half way with polystyrene chips or shredded newspaper. Avoid hay or straw. Place the smaller box inside the larger one, making sure that it can be opened easily to permit observation during hibernation. The tortoise should be carefully weighed on a weekly or twice monthly basis. An adult tortoise loses about 1% of its pre-hibernation weight every month while hibernating. A drastic weight loss indicates something is wrong; the animal should be brought out of hibernation immediately and checked. Make sure the tortoise is hibernated in a frost-free environment, at temperatures of 5-10 C. Tortoises exposed to temperatures below 5 C may experience post-hibernation anorexia, eye problems or even death. Use a maximum and minimum thermometer to monitor minimum temperatures. If the tortoise is kept too warm and becomes active it will consume its fat and glycogen reserves during hibernation which are needed for emergence. Start checking your tortoise from the end of January. When the animal starts moving bring the tortoise out of hibernation slowly, check for discharges from the nose, eyes and cloaca. Inspect the tortoise carefully, bathe the face and eyes and examine the mouth. Place the animal in a warm, shallow bath for at least 30 minutes every day. It is important that the tortoise empties its bladder and drinks. Keep the animal in a vivarium environment until the weather permits outdoor housing. Once out of hibernation and eating, keep the tortoise active (in a vivarium) if the weather deteriorates again. Any tortoise failing to drink or eat within 7 days of emergence should be examined by a veterinary surgeon.

#### HEALTH AND DISEASE.

Tortoises are susceptible to parasites, abscesses, pneumonia, runny nose syndrome, rat/fox/dog attacks, egg-binding, kidney and liver disease, shell damage, mouth rot, colic, intestinal obstructions and prolapses. Most of these conditions are treatable if presented early. Routine veterinary check-ups and worming in the Spring and Autumn are recommended.



