

Prehistoric Pets Care Sheet

Forest Hinge-Backed Tortoise (*Kinixys erosa*)

General Information

Forest hinge-backed tortoises are found throughout western Africa. The typical habitat of these tortoises is tropical forests, where it is warm and moist. Forest hinge-backed tortoises get their name from the ability to close the rear part of the shell. When the shell is closed it protects the back legs and tail from potential predators. Adults are not too large and reach 7-12 inches from front to back. Forest hinge-backed tortoises enjoy water and you should allow them to wade. Forest hinge-backed tortoises can be kept outside if the temperatures are acceptable. During the winter months, a heated shelter should be provided if you plan to keep your tortoise outside permanently. Forest hinge-backed tortoises do not hibernate and will die if exposed to cold temperatures. Since these tortoises come from a tropical area, we recommend that you spray your tortoises' pen with water from the hose or sprinklers everyday. Adult tortoises can be sexed fairly easily, males have a concave plastron, longer tails, and a claw like structure on the tip of the tail. Female forest hinge-backed tortoises have a flat plastron and the tail is noticeably smaller.



Temperature and UV Lighting

Forest hinge-backed tortoises need to be kept between 85-90 degrees during the day and the temperature can drop to 70 or above at night. Since they come from a humid environment, the humidity should be maintained from 70-80%. This level of humidity can be accomplished by misting the cage daily with water. UVB lighting allows the tortoise to naturally produce Vitamin D3. Vitamin D3 allows the tortoise to metabolize the proper amounts of calcium. A UVB light should be on 12-14 hours every day. Without UVB lighting the tortoise will eventually get metabolic bone disease. This causes the tortoises' bones to get soft and eventually will kill the tortoise. When kept outdoors no UVB lighting is needed, natural sunlight covers all requirements. Also it is very important to change your UVB light every 6-8 months, after this time the light stops producing adequate UVB. If you're not sure if your UV light is still producing UVB, bring it in and we'll be happy to test the light for you.

Housing

The cage for the tortoise should be big enough for it to have room to move around easily. Baby and juvenile tortoises can be housed in a 29 gallon terrarium. Once your tortoise is over 6 inches it can be safely kept outside.

Bedding

The best type of bedding would be some type of bark or Zoo Meds' Eco Earth. These beddings hold moisture very well allowing a higher humidity in the cage. Ideally, the bedding should also be kept a few inches deep to provide a place to burrow.

Calcium

A calcium and vitamin supplement should be put on its food every day as a baby. This can be reduced to 1-2 times a week as an adult. When kept indoors the supplement must contain Vitamin D3, because the UVB light alone does not produce enough D3 by itself. Once the tortoise is large enough to live outdoors, you cannot use a D3 supplement. Natural sunlight allows the tortoise to produce the perfect amount of D3 to keep it healthy. Over supplementation of D3 can be harmful to your tortoise.

Food

Forest hinge-backed tortoises are omnivores and their diet needs to be balanced between live foods, fruits, and vegetables. Ideal live foods are superworms, mealworms, waxworms, earthworms, snails and occasionally pink mice. Live food should make up 50% of the diet. The other 50% percent of their diet should include the following fruits and vegetables; collard greens, mustard greens, red leaf lettuce, green leaf lettuce, romaine lettuce, dandelion greens, hibiscus leaves and flowers, green onions, spinach, green beans, zucchini, frozen mixed vegetables, apples, bananas, strawberries, figs, peaches, mango, papaya, cantaloupe, grapes, blackberries, and blueberries. A mixed diet of these food items, five to seven times per week, is ideal and will ensure proper growth and health.

Cleaning and Handling

Any fecal matter or left over food should be cleaned out several times a week. The bedding should be completely changed once a month and fresh clean water should be provided at all times. The inside of the terrarium can be cleaned out with an appropriate reptile cage cleaner, we recommend Natural Chemistry's Healthy Habitat. Forest hinge-backed tortoises can be handled on a daily basis and always wash your hands after handling them.

Prehistoric Pets Inc. (909) 465-6085/www.reptileguru.com

"Maps courtesy of the University of Texas Libraries."