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WATER TURTLE HUSBANDRY AND CARE

HOUSING AND ENVIRONMENT

A 30-gallon tank with a screen top or a Rubbermaid container 30"x15"x8" is a good started enclosure for small turtles. Eventually the turtle will need at least a 70-gallon tank or a small pond (depending on the species). No substrate is recommended at the bottom of the aquarium because substrates, such as gravel, create an environment that promotes bacterial growth. Gravel can be ingested, also, and can lead to intestinal impactions. You can use larger rocks/river stones or plastic plants that are easy to scrub off with a dilute bleach solution. Water quality is the key to keeping your water turtle healthy. Change the entire tank once every 1-2 weeks. Additionally, change 50% of the water twice weekly. Under water filters will help keep water clean between changes. Remove all decorations from the tank, scrub with soap and water, rinse well and disinfect with dilute bleach water solution (1:15). Then rinse well with plain water. Most turtle species need a basking area to regulate their body temperatures. Offer a sturdy area for your turtle to get its entire body out of the water. The area should reach a temperature of 85 to 90 degrees. An incandescent bulb can be used to provide heat and a 5.0 UVb bulb is needed to provide light that helps prevent metabolic bone disease. These fluorescent bulbs need to be changed every six months. Mercury vapor bulbs can also be used. Glass and plastic prevent the UVb light from getting to the turtle. Natural sunlight is the best source of UVb light so take your turtle outside under strict supervision. Do not leave your turtle outside in a glass tank or enclosed container because it will overheat and do not leave your turtles unattended unless you are positive it is secure because they are easy targets for predators.

FEEDING

Offer floating turtle pellets and/or turtle sticks. If you teach your turtle to eat in a "feeding container" outside of the normal enclosure, that will help keep the water clean. We recommend REPCAL turtle pellets, other brands can have excessive amounts of fat in them. Using several brands will ensure your turtle gets a varied diet. Also offer leafy greens such Romaine lettuce, kale, collards and red and green leaf lettuce (float them in the water and remove uneaten portions). Crickets, goldfish, and earthworms (all store-bought only) can be offered occasionally as treats.

VETERINARY CARE

Yearly veterinary examinations are important for water turtles. Assessing water quality and husbandry help prevent problems such as respiratory infections and skin/shell infections. Routine veterinary care helps prevent or treat reproductive problems such as "egg-binding" and parasites present in the intestinal tract. If you would like to schedule an appointment, please call our office at 240-687-1414.