

## KEEPING ADVICE SHEET

# Long-necked Tortoises/Turtles

## Oblong Tortoise

*Chelodina oblonga*



**Oblong Tortoise** (*Chelodina oblonga*) – Maximum length 40 cm. Category 3.

**Flat-shelled Turtle** (*Chelodina steindachneri*) – Maximum length 20 cm. Category 4.

**NATURAL HABITS:** Oblong Tortoise occur in the southwest, north to Hill River and Flat-shelled Turtle from the Irwin River north to the De Gray River. Both species spend most of their time in water but have also been found on the move long distances from water. In the southwest, tortoises may become inactive during very cold weather by remaining

dormant in the water, or during hot dry weather by burying themselves in the topsoil and leaf litter.

Tortoises and turtles are primarily diurnal.

**IMPORTANT:** Ultraviolet light and a high calcium diet are especially important for tortoises and turtles maintained in artificial environments. Unless these requirements can be catered for then it is best that turtles not be kept.

**HOUSING:** For adult tortoises and turtles outdoor housing is preferable. This suits their larger size and aquatic lifestyle. Most importantly, for good health, it is essential that both sunshine and shade are available to your turtle when in the water and on land. Ensure that no rough edges exist on the bottom and sides of concrete enclosures. It is recommended that a shade cloth or bird netting aviary-like cover be used to exclude predators. Enclosures must be secure and escape proof.

**POND:** A 40 cm deep body of water about 100 x 150 cm with a dry land area is ideal for one or two adults. Any additional tortoises and turtles should be met with a corresponding increase in pond size. Enclosure wall should be smooth and at least 50 cm below ground and 100 cm high. Some form of protective cover made from shade cloth or bird netting is

optional but highly recommended. Loose soil or preferably a pile of loose dry grass cuttings or leaf litter should be made available to allow for hibernation during cooler months. This will also provide shelter when needed. A ramp or partially submerged log should be appropriately positioned to allow tortoises and turtles to leave the pond if they wish. The turtle pond must not be left to stagnate, this will minimise the risk of eye and shell infections. Periodically change half the pond water, or use a water pump and bio-filter.

**INDOOR HOUSING:** Adults can be kept indoors, although this is the least desired option. Juveniles can be kept in a suitably sized glass vivarium with warm water. A basking light is required over a basking site such as a submerged rock or log. UV light is very important for juvenile turtles' healthy development, so use full spectrum UV fluorescent lighting 12-14 hours per day. This needs to be replaced every six months or so to maintain its effectiveness.

**FOOD:** Long-necked tortoises and turtles can be voracious feeders on raw meat, insects, earthworms, crickets, small mice and fish. If using calcium deficient food such as raw meat regularly, it requires dusting with a calcium/vitamin supplement. Small fish (dead) such as *Gambusia* are perfect, and freshwater crayfish can sometimes be introduced to large ponds as a food source. Freshwater crayfish may be obtained from a pet store or caught from the wild under a fisher license. They normally take food only in the water however, in time, they will take food from tongs or tweezers. Feed adults about twice per week,

juveniles need more frequent feeding and much smaller food items: live water fleas (*Daphnia*), mosquito larvae and brine shrimp are ideal. Any uneaten dead food should be removed as quickly as possible. Food variety is very important for tortoises and turtles, feeding your tortoise or turtle solely on baitfish, for example, can cause vitamin deficiency.

**CAPTIVE BEHAVIOUR/BREEDING:** Long-necked tortoises and turtles usually do well in captivity and adjust almost immediately. After any handling always wash hands in warm soapy water. Sex determination is sometimes difficult with males generally having a curved plastron (lower shell) and longer tail. Females tend to be larger. All turtles lay eggs. Juveniles should not be housed with adults.

**DISEASES:** A clean artificial tortoise or turtle environment with the appropriate husbandry mentioned above will usually result in your pets remaining healthy. Quarantine newly acquired animals for at least a month before introducing them to those already being kept.

#### **FURTHER READING:**

*Care of Australian Reptiles in Captivity* – John Weigel. Reptile Keepers Association, Gosford, NSW.

*Keeping Long-necked Turtles* – Darren Green. Australian Reptile Keeper Publications, Melbourne, Victoria.

*Understanding Reptile Parasites* - Roger J. Klingenberg. AVS, USA.