



## Husbandry Handbook

# RED FOOTED TORTOISE

(*Chelonoidis carbonaria*)

### Beautiful, Tropical Lifelong Friends

Red Footed Tortoises are common pets in the United States. Their native range is from southern Central America and down into South America. These rainforest dwellers spend most of their time eating and relaxing. In the rainforest, they can be found out by themselves exploring and looking for mates and food, or in groups huddled into a particular hiding spot. They even leave scent trails for other tortoises to find safety as well. Even in the wild, these tortoises rarely display defensive habits against other Red Footed Tortoises and will eat and live communally with little problems. They can be found around fruit trees when the fruit becomes ripe and falls from the tree or even eating on carrion on the forest floor. They also play an important role in seed distribution for some plant species that they consume. As beautiful and personable as these tortoises are, they also live a VERY long time. Having a pet that can live up to 80 years means being ready to house and care for that animal through its entire life. That's a HUGE commitment and shouldn't be taken lightly, but these amazing pets are worth it.

### Habitat

Being a more rainforest species, these tortoises live in tropical areas. While these places do have a wet and dry season, these tortoises nearly always have access to water and food. In the extremes of the seasons, the tortoises can be found hiding from the dry and cool or hot and humid weather by burrowing into leaf litter or finding an abandoned hole to hide in. Their favorite places to hide are under fallen trees and in piles of leaf litter, sticks, and debris.

### Housing

Red Footed Tortoises require escape proof housing and the ability to control humidity as this is very important to their development and growth. As babies, they can start out in a Zilla® 20L Front Opening Terrarium. It's important to remember that as they grow and develop, they will require larger accommodations. For adults a custom designed habitat is the most suitable. A minimum of 3' by 6' is recommended for one adult. To maintain humidity in the enclosure, use substrates such as Zilla® Jungle Mix, Zilla® Bark Blend and Zilla® Coconut Husk Brick. Provide babies with a large Zilla® Terraced Dish, and provide adults with a large bowl or pan to drink. They will often climb into the water bowl and will almost always go to the bathroom in it. Be diligent with keeping their water clean.

### Temperature and Lighting

It is important to create a thermal gradient (or a warm side) in the cage/enclosure. Ideal temperatures for Red Footed Tortoises range from 78-82°F on the cool side and 80-85°F on the warm side. Provide a basking area on

the warm side around 90°F. Red Footed Tortoises also require UVB lighting to thrive and stay healthy. Using a Zilla® Heat & UVB Fixture with a Zilla® 50W Mini Halogen bulb and a Zilla® Pro Series Tropical 25 UVB/UVA bulb will provide the correct heat and UVB needed for your Red Footed Tortoise as a baby. For larger adult enclosures, Zilla® Pro Sol Fixtures with recommended bulbs for tropical enclosures make the perfect lighting solution and can even be mounted above a pen. Make sure to provide night heat when needed. DO NOT supply your tortoise with heat from beneath by using a heat mat. Belly heat can affect the digestion of tortoises and even make males sterile. Spot clean the enclosure for urates, feces, or uneaten food at least twice per week, and every 2 months, remove all substrate and clean and disinfect the terrarium and décor.

### Feeding and Diet

In the wild, Red Footed Tortoises are omnivores but mostly eat vegetation. In captivity they eat a variety of leafy greens, vegetables and fruits. Be careful when feeding fresh fruit and use it only as a treat. They can also be offered Zilla® Munchies Vegetable Mix and other fresh veggies. When feeding, spray the veggies with Zilla® Calcium Supplement and Zilla® Vitamin Supplement 1-2 times weekly for additional calcium and Vitamin D3, along with other essential nutrients. A great list of food options can be found in our Zilla Feeding Guide.

### Handling

Babies can often be very shy. Remember that to them, you're a giant predator. Approach them slowly and pick them up from below when possible. Don't hold them in the air for long as this is unusual and stressful for them. Handle your Red Footed Tortoise gently and deliberately, taking care not to drop or injure the animal. Red Footed Tortoises quickly get used to their owners and become quite docile and personable pets to keep.

**Also be sure to wash your hands after handling any animals.**

