*We Know Pets*

PET

# TURTLES
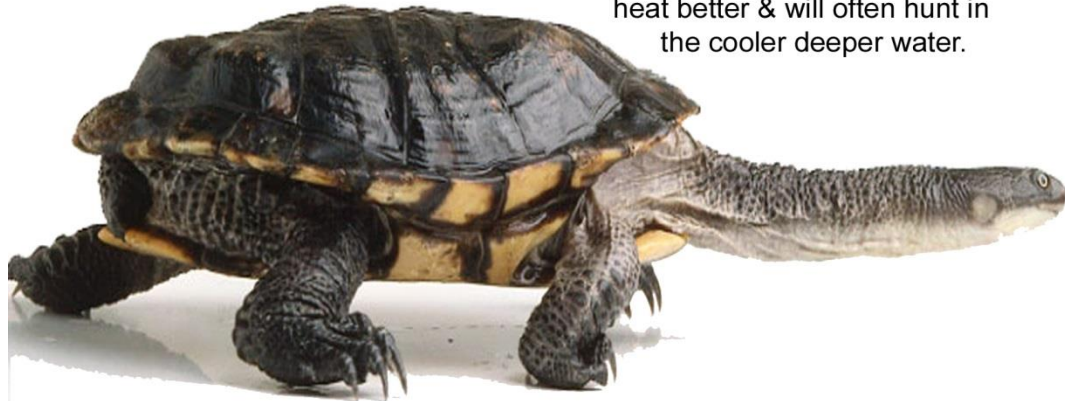
## A pet with links to pre historic times!

*All Australian reptiles are protected species in Australia. To keep one as a pet in NSW you will need a reptile licence.*

Although turtles are a reptile they differ from their scaled cousins by having a hard shell known as a carapace.

Turtles are often referred to as tortoises to differentiate them from the great sea turtles. However, sea turtles are true turtles as they require an aquatic environment to live. Tortoises only require water for drinking, swimming, hunting & eating, & actually live on land! The turtles origins can be traced back some 220 million years ago.

The two most commonly kept captive turtles are the Murray Short Neck & the Eastern Long Neck. The Murray Short Neck is found throughout the Murray Darling systems, & spends the vast majority of it's time in the water. The Eastern Long Neck is found in slow moving bodies of water such as dams & will often move between dams after heavy summer rains.

Young turtles cannot easily store heat in their body so they are found in the shallower warmer waters. Due to their greater size, adult turtles can hold heat better & will often hunt in the cooler deeper water.

**Lighting**- All turtles require a source of UVA & UVB light. This ensures that the turtle can absorb calcium to keep their carapace (the top of the shell) & plastron (the underside of the turtle) strong. The bones & claws of the turtle also require UVB light on a daily basis.

Turtles also require a day / night cycle known as the photoperiod. All of the UVA, UVB & photoperiod requirements can be achieved by using UV 5.0 fluorescent tube across the top the tank. This should be connected to a timer so the photoperiod remains the same day in day out. Turtles rest for large portions of the day (up to 14 hours) so regular photoperiod is essential.

*Turtles, like all reptiles are ectotherms, meaning they heat up from the outside in!*

**Heat**- Like all reptiles turtles require an external source of heat so they can be active & digest food. The most effective way to achieve this in a captive environment is to heat the water of the aquarium with an aquarium heater. Both Eastern Long Necks & Murray Short Necks have a preferred body temperature of 27 degrees but can live as low as 22 degrees or as high as 30 degrees. Temperatures outside these ranges will cause stress for your turtle. A thermometer should also be used to monitor the actual temperature inside the terrarium.

**Housing**- Both species can grow to shell size of approximately 20-30cm in the captive environment so an aquarium that holds at least 120 litres is best suited. Turtles do best when kept solo as they can become aggressive with each other as they grow.

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### Continued.......

The terrarium requires a dry area where your turtle can climb out to dry itself. Some terrariums have a shelf built in for this or you can use a turtle dock which mounts onto the back of any terrarium. Your turtle will only eat in the water & can be quite messy. Any uneaten food can quickly foul the water so a good filtration system is essential.

Depending on the size of the terrarium, either a canister filter or internal filter will achieve this. The filter should be cleaned out on a regular basis & the filter material changed when necessary. As strange as it may sound turtles can actually drown so it's important that the filter is positioned so the turtle cannot become stuck underneath or beside it.

**Habitat & décor**-Your terrarium can be decorated using variety of pieces including wood, rocks & ornaments. You can also use some live plants. These not only look great but they are also an alternate source of food for your turtle. As with your filter ensure that the design of your décor will not trap your turtle.

*Uneaten food should be removed from the terrarium as it will quickly decay & cause problems with the water quality.*

**Feeding**- Although turtles are omnivores, their primary diet should be meaty foods such frozen turtle dinner, bloodworms, chopped up raw prawn & also a commercial turtle pellet. Turtles are messy eaters so ensure that you feed small amounts over a series of minutes rather than all the food in one go. Green foods can be derived from placing plants in the terrarium or small amounts of finely chopped Asian greens.

## Maintenance of your terrarium

\*Undertake a water change of your terrarium every 2 weeks to ensure that the water quality remains of a high standard.

\*Use a gravel siphon to clean the gravel substrate.

\*Always use a water conditioner to remove the chlorine & chloramine from the replacement water.

\*Add 1 teaspoon of aquarium salt per 10 litres of water in your terrarium to help reduce the chance of fungal infection in your turtle.

\*Always have a seperate bucket that is used for your water changes. Never use this bucket for other household tasks as detergents can be harmful to the health of your turtle.