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RED-EARED SLIDERS

General Information:

The red-eared slider is the most popular freshwater turtle in captivity. The North American natives name is attributed to the red stripe behind the eye and their habit of sliding off rocks and logs if startled. The red-eared slider is primarily aquatic but will emerge from the water for basking. Average body length ranges from 5-8 inches but can reach up to 12 inches. The life span of a red-slider is 15-25+ years. They do not like frequent handling and may bite if frightened. It is important to wash hands thoroughly after handling to reduce the potential for salmonellosis.

Diet:

In captivity, the diet for juveniles should consist primarily of commercial aquatic turtle pellets. The diet can be supplemented with occasional small live fish, tubifex worms, and earthworms. Once a week chopped leafy greens or finely chopped mixed vegetables may be offered. Once adults, 50% of the diet may contain pellets and animal-based protein while the other 50% should consist of chopped plant matter such as kale, romaine, red leaf lettuce, mustard greens, dandelion, watercress, parsley, Swiss chard, shredded carrot or squash, thawed frozen vegetables and fruits. Adults can be fed every 2-3 days. Turtles should be fed in a separate container from their housing enclosure to reduce fouling of the water.

Housing:

The minimum enclosure size for a red-eared slider should be at least 40 gallons. A good rule of thumb is 10 gallons per inch of turtle. The water depth should be at least 1.5 to 2 times the turtle's carapace length with several inches of air space between the surface water and top edge of the tank to prevent escapes. You can add slate, rock, or gravel that is too large to eat to the bottom of the aquarium. Sliders foul the water quickly with their messy eating and frequent defecation so it is important to have a water filtration system in place. Basking areas underneath a heat source at the water line of the tank should be provided. Water temperature should be maintained at 82-85 degrees F for hatchlings and 75-85 degrees F for adults. Air temperature under the basking light should be 85-90 degrees F. UVB rays with full spectrum lighting for 10-12 hours a day is also required. Thoroughly clean and disinfect the habitat at least once a week using 3% bleach solution.

Health:

A newly purchased red-eared slider should be taken to a veterinarian for a wellness exam and fecal check for parasites. A healthy turtle will be active and alert, eating regularly, have a hard shell with no lesions, clear bright eyes, skin with no sores, and a clear nose and vent. Turtles should be seen by a veterinarian for eye, nose or mouth discharge, discoloration, bumps, or spot on the shell or skin, lethargy, overgrown beak, swelling behind the tympanum, frantic swimming, abnormal feces, and sneezing, runny nose.