

# Leopard tortoises

## Heat and Light

This species requires constant access to very high levels of illumination and constant warmth. For light, we recommend that several high quality full spectrum tubes or UV-Heat lamps are used on all indoor terrariums. An incandescent spot lamp or infra-red dull emitter may also be required to provide basking heat to ensure normal activity and feeding. A temperature gradient is vital, from about 22 °C to 30 °C (about 72 °F to 86 °F) is adequate for this species. Leopard tortoises may be kept out of doors in some areas, Southern California, for example, but in northern regions outdoor maintenance may only be possible for a very limited period each year. Leopard tortoises can make good pets – but only if you have the space and can provide the correct environment.

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*A typical adult leopard tortoise*

The Leopard tortoise is a large and attractively marked tortoise which has a wide distribution in sub-Saharan Africa, including recorded localities in southern Sudan, Ethiopia, Eastern Africa (including Natal), Zambia, Botswana, Namibia, Angola and Southwest Africa. In this species males may attain a greater size than females, a characteristic shared with certain other members of the genus *Geochelone*, including Galapagos tortoises. Large examples may be 60 cm (over 2 feet) long and weigh over 35 kg (about 80 lbs.).

This tortoise favours semi-arid, thorny to grassland habitats. It is, however, also found in some regions featuring a higher level of precipitation. Not surprisingly, given its propensity for grassland habitats it grazes, extensively upon mixed grasses. It also favours the fruit and pads of the prickly pear (*Opuntia* sp.), succulents and thistles. In captivity it is a common error to feed too much 'wet' food such as lettuce, tomatoes and fruit; in reality this tortoise requires a coarse, high fibre diet. Feeding excessive fruit or 'soft' foods frequently leads to repeated flagellate and other gut problems such as colic, most probably as a result of increased gut motility. Leopard tortoises will graze happily on lawn grass if presented with the opportunity and this seems to prevent most such problems at source. Meat products should never be given to Leopard tortoises. They invariably lead to excessive growth, poor bone formation, dangerously high blood-urea levels, bladder 'stones' and liver problems. Due to their prodigious rate of growth, their demand for calcium and mineral trace elements is high. A calcium-D3 supplement should be provided daily.

**Further details on keeping & breeding  
Leopard tortoises are available  
from the Tortoise Trust.**

- From Southern Africa
- Do not hibernate
- 100% herbivorous diet
- From dry grassland habitats
- Does not tolerate damp or cold
- Grows very quickly
- Requires extensive outdoor and indoor accommodation
- Regular soaking or constant access to water recommended

