



CARE SHEET

Gibba Toad-headed Turtle

mesoclemmys gibba

The Gibba Toad-headed Turtle *mesoclemmys gibba* is one of the smallest species of toad-headed turtles native to the northern parts of the South American continent. They have an oval carapace which is dark brown or black, the plastron is also dark coloured with cream coloured margins more obvious in younger specimens.

This species of turtle normally reaches around 7 inches, but some grow up to 8 inches. The measurement is the carapace length (back shell) as measured in a straight line (not curved over the apex of the carapace).

Housing



As a keeper it is our job to make their habitat as close as possible to their home environment. In the wild they live in swamps, ponds and streams under a closed canopy forest. I use dead oak and magnolia leaves to release tannins into the water, lower the PH level and give the turtles a leaf litter bottom to forage in. Other bogwoods and leaves can be used, please check to ensure they are not toxic.

Although they can swim, they also like to be able to climb/walk on items. In a captive habitat they should be provided with water with lots of plants and bog wood etc. to climb on and hide in. The recommended enclosure size is at least a floor plan of 4 x their length x 2 length. An adult therefore, could easily need a tank 32 x 16 x 16 inches for one animal.

A basking area is required so that the animals can rest and dry off completely. They also use this area to regulate their temperature and UV light absorption. A basking area can be a floating item like bark, or a commercially purchased turtle ramp, equally it can be fixed such as a log or rocks. I prefer to build an above tank basking

area which is fixed with a ramp. This prevents movement or sinking and means I can regulate the basking spot in terms of lighting and heat.

Real or fake plants should be provided to allow the animals to exhibit natural hiding or resting behaviour. Note they will try to eat the plants, so plastic plants should be sturdy.

Many keepers like to provide a substrate on the bottom of the tank. Substrate is not required and a tank without it will stay cleaner more easily. Gravel SHOULD NOT be used as the turtles often swallow it in search of food and are unable to pass it, resulting in gut impaction which can be fatal. I recommend play sand marketed for children's sand pits. This will allow natural foraging behaviour and purchase on the bottom of the tank. Make sure it is very well rinsed beforehand to remove all dust and fine particles.

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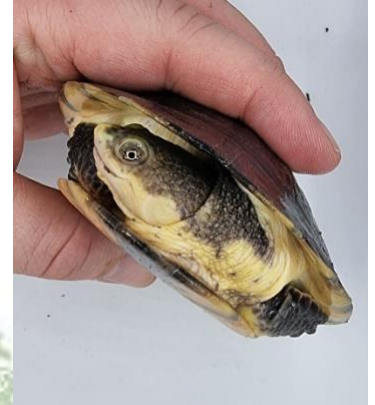
Written by Dudley Pinson ©The Turtle Emporium 2020

Heat and light

Water temperature should be in the range of 27-29°C.

UVB and UVA (heat) are both required to maintain correct internal temperatures and synthesis of vitamin D3 and calcium. UVB can be achieved using screw in bulb type UVB lamps or the longer T5 tubes. A UVB of 5% (5.0) – to 10% (10.0) should be provided. Replace UVB bulbs at least every 12 months. A ceramic heat emitter or normal basking bulb can provide UVA and heat. Wattage depends on distance from basking area. The basking area should be - 35°C under the heat lamp. Avoid coloured bulbs and use only those closest to the natural spectrum. The lights should be set to a timer to provide 10-12 hours of light per day during natural hours.

Do not allow the water or enclosure to get too hot as this can trigger aestivation, where the turtles become dormant in a summer sleep similar to hibernation.



Filtration

Turtles are dirty animals and leave a lot of waste by leftover food and faecal matter. They need filtration 3 x more powerful than what is recommended for fish in the same volume water. All commercially purchased filters will have a rating based on fish, so make sure you bear this in mind. Young *m.gibba* lack the strength to swim in a strong current, so a weaker flow should be used at this age. Adults will need a decent sized external canister filter.

This species can suffer from fungal skin problems. A warm water temperature and low PH level can counteract this.

Diet

M.gibba are mainly carnivorous. They prefer prey animals such as fish, crustacea, insects and amphibians and in captivity their main part of their diet will consist of commercially available pellets, bloodworm, earthworms, fish, crickets and similar. This can be supplemented with fruits such as mango and banana. Variation is key and a piece of cuttlebone should be provided at all times for calcium and to keep the beak trim.

This guide is meant to be a quick reference/starter guide and does not replace more in-depth research on this species. Always ensure that you know the correct care needs for your animal. The information provided here can be found in greater detail in the book *Toad-headed Turtles of the Genus Mesoclemmys* by Stephan Ettmar.



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