



CARE SHEET

Yellow-spotted Amazon River Turtle *Podocnemis unifilis*



The Yellow-spotted Amazon River Turtle (*podocnemis unifilis*) is endemic to the Amazon and Orinoco river basins all over the northern part of South America. They are very large turtles, males reach 14" and females up to 27", the measurement is the carapace length (back shell) as measured in a straight line (not curved over the apex of the carapace). The carapace is black or brown and the head has large distinctive yellow spots, giving this animal its name. *Podocnemis* are a side necked species of turtle, tucking its head sideways under the carapace as opposed to straight in like a slider or cooter.

Housing

Podocnemis unifilis are an aquatic species of turtle and very strong swimmers pretty much straight from birth. In a captive habitat they should be provided with water at least four times the depth that they are long and with a floor plan 4 x their length x 2 length. An adult therefore, could easily need water 60 x 30 x 60 inches as a minimum.

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 when young, but adults can reach 8kg so need a basking area which they cannot sink. 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

Being tropical animals this species need to be kept warm. Water temperature and air temperature should be in the range of 24 - 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 T8 tubes. A UVB of 5% (5.0) – to 10% (10.0) should be provide. 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 30-35°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.

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 *podocnemis* 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.

Diet

Podocnemis unifilis are a carnivorous species when young, eating live food, blood worms, mosquito larvae and pellets. This should be supplemented with red and green lettuce (not spinach or iceberg) various fruits like peaches, grapes and melon. Variation is key and a piece of cuttlebone should be provided at all times for calcium and to keep the beak trim. As the animals' age they will eat more and more plant and fruit matter. An adult should be eating 90% plant matter to 10% protein

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.



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