



CARE SHEET

Cooter *Pseudemys*



The Cooter is a large species of turtle native to the southern United States of America. There are three main species River Cooters (*pseudemys concinna*), Pond Cooters (*pseudemys floridana*) and Red-bellied Cooters (*p. rubriventris*, *nelsoni* and *bangsi*). These species are further sub-divided into subspecies too numerous to mention here. This species was generally imported to fill the gap that Sliders (*trachemys scripta*) left behind. Unfortunately for most hobbyists they grow much larger. Males reaching 9-10 inches and females anything up to 16 inches. All species tend to have a dark olive coloured carapace and a yellow plastron (save for the red-bellied turtles), powerfully webbed legs and dark skin with white or yellow stripes.

Housing

Pseudemys 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 depth. An adult male therefore, could easily need water 48 x 20 x 20 inches as a minimum, a female 60 x 30 x 30 inches. It's the size of these animals that makes them better suited to large tubs or ponds.

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 for young animals should be in the range of 25-27°C. This can be reduced to 20-22°C for adults.



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 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 35-40°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 *pseudemys* lack the strength to swim in a strong current, so a weaker flow should be used at this age. Adults will need a large sized external canister filter.

Diet

Pseudemys are an omnivorous species when young, eating plant and prey matter. In captivity 50% of their diet should consist of protein which includes commercially available pellets. The other 50% should be vegetation, I feed red and green lettuce, escarole, water cress but NEVER spinach or iceberg. Variation is key and a piece of cuttlebone should be provided at all times for calcium and to keep the beak trim. As they animals age they will eat more and more plant matter. An adult should be eating 75% plant matter to 25% 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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