



Lesser Tenrec Care Sheet

Based on the official South Africa's Hedgehog Breeders Association (SAHBA) guidelines

1. HOUSING & CAGE SETUPS

Cage Dimensions

- **Minimum floor area:** 900 mm × 450 mm, with a minimum height of 500 mm. Higher cages are allowed to accommodate climbing accessories and ladders.

Ventilation & Mesh

- Cages must have a secure roof to prevent escape.
- Proper ventilation is critical to prevent ammonia build-up, which leads to upper respiratory infections.
- **Welded mesh openings:** must not exceed 20 mm × 20 mm (preferably lined with fly screen netting to contain feeder insects).

Enclosure Types

- Glass fish tanks are not suitable due to poor ventilation.
- Terrariums with fine mesh ventilation on the sides and top are acceptable.
- New reptile cages are suitable if extra ventilation holes are provided.
- Avoid second-hand reptile enclosures, as residual scents can cause severe stress and respiratory distress.

Placement

- Keep enclosures in a quiet area away from fireplaces, heaters, fans, loud music, or direct sunlight.
- Ensure access to natural room light to support a regular day/night cycle.

Sleeping Den

- Provide a solid, safe house/sleeping den (e.g., wooden cabin, card box den, or artificial log).
- Line the den with a small fleece blanket, dry moss, or dry leaves.
- Bonding pouches and beanies alone are not adequate housing.

Substrates

- **Recommended:** A combination of Eco Litter (at least 5 cm thick), bark chips, coco husk, or kiddies' play sand in a designated bath tray. Coco peat can be used if cage humidity is monitored.
- **Unsafe substrates:** Traditional/crystal cat litter, fleece mats, wood shavings, grass, corn cob, newspaper, non-slip rubber, or Chinchilla bath sand (causes respiratory issues).

Accessories

- **Exercise wheel:** Optional if sufficient climbing structures are provided. If used, wheels must measure 25–30 cm with a solid running surface (wire/mesh wheels catch claws and break limbs).
- **Bowls:** Use low, heavy ceramic/cat bowls for food and shallow water. Do not use water bottles; tenrecs cannot adapt to them due to their snout shape.
- **Heating & climate:** Maintain winter cage temperatures around 18–19 °C and summer temperatures between 22–26 °C. Plastic/foil heat pads (placed under tiles/dens) or non-light-emitting ceramic heat emitter lamps with ceramic sockets and temperature controllers are recommended for juveniles. Avoid white or infrared globes that disrupt light cycles.

2. DIET & FEEDING

Dietary Classification

- Tenrecs are faunivorous (eating small animals/insects) rather than strictly insectivorous.
- They lack a cecum, making it difficult to digest raw plant fibers.

Staple Insects (90% of Diet)

- Mealworms, superworms, silkworms, crickets, black soldier fly larvae (BSFL), and live or frozen pinkies.

Gut Loading

- Feeder insects must be gut-loaded prior to feeding with grains, dark leafy greens (avoid spinach), carrots, apples, and cat pellets to boost nutritional value.

Supplementation

- Dust insects with Calcium D3 2–3 times per week to maintain a correct calcium-to-phosphorus ratio and prevent Metabolic Bone Disease (MBD).

Supplemental Foods & Treats

- Cooked/scrambled eggs (no salt/oil), unseasoned cooked minced meat, cooked chicken, and chicken livers.
- Wet cat food sachets or recovery mousses (e.g., Royal Canin Recovery Mousse) as occasional treats.
- Small portions of fruits (e.g., bananas, apples, strawberries, or figs) can be offered occasionally.

Foods to Avoid

- **Dry cat kibble:** The hard structure shatters their specialized V-shaped (zalambdodont) teeth, leading to broken cusps, tooth abscesses, severe attrition, and tooth loss.
- **Raw meats/eggs:** Avoid due to high risks of Salmonella and bacterial infection.

3. TORPOR CARE

Nature of Torpor

- Torpor is an involuntary, natural metabolic state used to survive energy scarcity and extreme seasonal conditions.
- During torpor, heart rate, respiration, body temperature, and digestion slow down drastically.

Seasonal Expectations

- In South Africa, deep torpor typically occurs during winter months (around April/May to September).
- Daily/short torpor occurs during hot summer spells or after environmental changes.

Waking & Spring Transition

- As tenrecs wake up (around September), their activity and appetite may fluctuate.
- It is normal for a tenrec to be awake, decline food, or return to torpor temporarily during spring cold fronts.

Critical Guidelines during Torpor

- **Never force feed:** Do not force-feed a tenrec in torpor; its digestive tract is inactive, and forced feeding can cause death.
- **Do not over-heat adults:** Forcing adult tenrecs awake with excessive artificial heat severely disrupts their natural immunity and metabolic health.

4. HEALTH & DISEASE MANAGEMENT

Home-Treatable Conditions

- **Mites (Acariasis):** Symptoms include heavy scratching, lost quills, dry/flaky skin, and crusted ear edges. Treat with a full tube of Revolution for Kittens or NexGard Combo for Kittens applied behind the neck (repeat after 2 weeks). Disinfect all cage bedding and offer soothing Betadine, oatmeal, or Rooibos tea baths.
- **Worms:** Symptoms include runny/neon-green stools, white specks in faeces, and weight loss. Treat with kitten dewormers (e.g., Milpro or Drontal dissolved in water via syringe) or spot-on Revolution/NexGard Combo (repeat after 3 weeks).
- **Minor digestion issues:** Runny, loose, or slimy green stools can be treated by adding Protexin (a soluble probiotic) over food or insects.
- **Bleeding nails:** Rinse with cold water and dip the toe in cornstarch, flour, or maize meal to halt bleeding.

Conditions Requiring Veterinary Intervention

- **Respiratory infections:** Caused by drafts, wet bedding, cold temperatures, or viral/bacterial pathogens. Symptoms include sneezing, nasal crusts, wheezing, clicking, and lethargy. Requires vet-prescribed antibiotics, supportive syringe feeding, and strictly supervised nebulization.
- **Oral & dental problems:** Dental abscesses, gum infections, and tooth decay (occurring if a tenrec enters torpor while food remains in its mouth) require professional veterinary examination and antibiotics.
- **Metabolic Bone Disease (MBD):** Caused by an improper calcium-to-phosphorus ratio (e.g., an all-insect diet without Calcium D3). Causes soft/brittle bones, rubber jaw, paralysis, and joint deformities. Diagnosis requires X-rays; MBD is often fatal if not caught and treated early via vet-managed calcium therapy.
- **Internal parasites & severe stools:** Stools that are black or contain visible blood signal critical internal bleeding or severe systemic issues requiring emergency veterinary care.

Source: South Africa's Hedgehog Breeders Association (SAHBA) guidelines.

Credit: Nikitha Meyer.