

KEEPING BURMESE BROWN TORTOISES - *Beginners Guide to Burmese Browns*



Above: M. emys emys Left : Adult of 7 years / Right: Juvenile of 4 months.

Introduction

The Burmese Brown tortoise (*Manouria emys emys*) is a rarely kept species in the UK although captive bred specimens do pop up from time to time.

The genus *Manouria* has only two extant species left - the Burmese Brown and the impressed tortoise *Manouria impressor*. The latter species generally does poorly in captivity and should be avoided especially if wild caught. This genus is thought to be an early evolved tortoise genus and probably one of the first of the true land tortoises.

Burmese Browns are large tortoises regularly attaining a size of 60cm long and up to 20Kg in weight.

At present there are two known subspecies *M. emys emys* and *M. emys phayrei*, the latter is the larger. Both tortoises are a solid brown to black colour with thick set long legs covered with quite spiny scales. There are two spurs on each thigh and quite protruding scales from the heels (leading to the species' native common name of the six-legged tortoise).

The Burmese Brown tortoise inhabits thick tropical rainforest habitat, being commonly found close to water in mountainous regions across tropical Asia.



Above: Burmese habitat

Picture from www.asiaphoto.de

Housing in captivity

In captivity they require large quarters with plenty of indoor space, Burmese do not like bright sunlight and prefer shaded conditions. A large insulated heated shed or greenhouse will be required with access to a well planted outside area. Provide plenty of water since Browns like it wet; these tortoises drink heavily and love to soak for prolonged periods. High humidity is essential for keeping skin in good condition.



These tortoises tend to do better if heated from below. They generally shy away from heat lamps, preferring to burrow into a warm substrate of damp bark chips. Burmese Browns do not like high temperatures and prefer ambient temperatures of about 25-28C. Adult animals are remarkably cold hardy and are often active and feeding at only 10C. This makes them an ideal species for keeping outdoors with access to a heated shed all year around in the UK.

Feeding

Feeding this species of tortoise is a controversial subject since there are various views on the types of diet fed. Typically, Burmese Browns are fed a rainforest tortoise diet of chopped fruit, leafy greens and a small portion of animal protein once per week or so. Some European keepers have challenged this idea and believe these animals should be fed a higher fibre green leaf diet with little or no fruit and no access to animal protein.

My own animals were captive bred juveniles only one week old when they first arrived. Since day one they have been fed a rainforest tortoise diet including chopped fruit, edible weeds and small amounts of animal protein. These animals have grown quickly and healthily with smooth shells and strong bone development.

Diet

Daily: Chopped apple, cucumber, apricot, fig, banana, plum, dandelion (leaves and flowers), sow thistle, plantain, curly kale and water cress, mixed together with calcium carbonate powder. Animals which have regular access to an outdoor area and natural grazing feed on anything green including fresh grass and dried grass, preferring Spillers ready grass to normal hay types.

Weekly: Protein is given once weekly. Under the age of two years feed Zoo Med tortoise pellets and soaked dry cat or dog food (usually lams) mixed with calcium carbonate powder. Over the age of two years I have changed this slightly by adding cooked chopped pieces of chicken and Zoopreme Primate leaf eater pellets (usually fed dry, mixed with calcium carbonate).

Breeding

Breeding Burmese Brown tortoises is quite straightforward and can happen any time throughout the year. These tortoises are very gentle with each other. Groups of animals can be kept together without aggression. Try to keep less males and more females together though.

Females produce large nest mounds to deposit eggs. These nests are usually constructed from dead leaves and rotting vegetation. In captivity keepers have recorded this species using straw, bark chips and shredded newspaper. Once the nest is constructed the female positions herself in the centre of it to lay her eggs. These tortoises are highly productive and may lay as many as forty eggs per clutch. After nesting the female covers the eggs and sprawls on top of the nest to protect them.



Eggs typically measure 50-55mm and weigh around 60g. They will require a high humidity of around 80% to hatch and at 29C will hatch in 60-90 days.

Hibernation

These tortoises do not hibernate.

Conclusion

In conclusion Burmese Browns are quite easily maintained in captivity. They are a large active tortoise which grows quickly. They are friendly, personable tortoises which are very rewarding if kept properly.

Useful Website

www.manouria.nl

Please Note: More detailed case study by Dillon Prest also available

With thanks to Dillon for this article.