



## TORTOISE POST HIBERNATION INFORMATION SHEET

**IMPORTANT:** This guide is aims to be an introduction to post hibernation care. If you have any concerns regarding your tortoise health, you should always seek advice from a knowledgeable vet as soon as possible.

- **WHY HIBERNATE:** All healthy Mediterranean species of tortoise require some form of winter cooling to remain healthy in captivity. There are several different species of Mediterranean tortoise, and it really depends on their natural range, to determine how long hibernation should be, or whether they should hibernate at all. Please refer to our hibernation sheet for more info.
- **KEEP RECORDS:** Keep records of weights, dates and observations during wake up time and throughout the year to help you and your vet know your pet. Understanding your own tortoise patterns will help you make informed decisions each year. Decisions will vary from year to year based on how well your tortoises lived that year.
- **WHEN TO WAKE UP:** For temperature reasons UK keepers tend to hibernate during Dec, Jan and Feb as food is harder to find and winter is most bitter. Exact wake up date will depend on age, species and general health of your animal. (again consult hibernation info sheet)
- **HOW TO WAKE UP** – Once a tortoise has gently risen to room temperature. Helping your tortoise to return to normal behavior can save a lot of problems. Close monitoring can help you spot early signs or even prevent illness and fatalities.
- **SLOW RISE IN BOX TEMPERATURE:** Take your tortoise's container from its hibernation space to a heated household room the evening before waking Temperature around approx. 19c. Remove any lids to allow more air movement and leave for 6-8 hours so the tortoises can gently warm to room temperature.
- **HEALTH CHECKS:** Make a close visual check of your animal. Your tortoise should not have lost more than 5% of its body weight ideally. If you can carefully open mouth and check that the mouth is pink and clear. If necessary use a cotton bud to remove build up. (yellow mouth rot common and would require vet treatment) check eyes, limbs and tail for unusual sores or swellings that may need vet attention.
- **BATHS:** Give daily 15-20 minute warm bathes daily. Baths helps the tortoise rehydrate and perge toxins which would have built up during hibernation. One normal activity has resumed weekly bathes and checks can resume. Good hydration in essential for healthy hibernation recovery. Regular baths and water dishes must be provided. REPTOBOOST can be a useful in helping a tortoise kick start from hibernation and is easily added to water. CRITICAL CARE and swift vet check is recommended for animals who appear particulalr debilitated. WORMING must NEVER take place straight out of hibernation. Tortoises need time to strengthen from a hibernation period and should only receive routine medication once full strength is restored to avoid unnecessary sickness.
- **CORRECT HEAT:** Please note that tortoise(s) need a basking heat source to aid swift recovery from hibernation. Ambient temperature from radiators, heat mats is insufficient. Heat and light is vitally important to provide tortoises post hibernation. Lamp Heat and light stimulate the tortoises body functions. Basking area should be around 30c for meds and 19 c ambient. Night time temp no lower than 15 to avoid tortoise returning to hibernation state. Temperature guide will vary between species.
- **FEEDING:** A post hibernation tortoise(s) should ideally feed within 10 days of waking. Gentle coaxing with fresh cucumber or hand feeding can help a tortoise with its first bite, which is the hardest. Hand feeding is very successful method, please consult your local vet or club for support on the matter if required. Feeding tubes are strongly advised against unless a tortoises is extremely sick. Dangers of overfeeding by tube are high and often is not solving original feeding problem.

- **FOOD SOURCES: Finding food can be a worry this time of year. Below are a few suggestions.**
  - **Wild feeding** – fresh/dry The best option for nutritious balanced diet by far and free!
  - **Home grown** – cactus, weed mix, edible flowers (Not solely clover for babies)
  - **Supermarket** – Lambs lettuce, water cress, rocket, mixed herb salad
  - (never containing spinach, cabbage, kale, beetroot leaves, fruit or other veg)
- It is particular important to use vitamin supplement rich in calcium such as Nutrobal this time of year as less natural vitamins and minerals will be present in food and natural light.
- **CAREFUL OBSERVATIONS: Examples of problems which will require a check from a vet.**
  - **URINE & FAECES:** ensure tortoise resumes normal motions within approx. 2 weeks. This can be aided by daily bathes until this happens.
  - **SMELL:** A strong unusual smell from urates which could indicate bad bacteria.
  - **INACTIVE:** A quiet tortoise that will not feed, sunken eyes and generally out of character
  - **PINKING** undershell, damage which smells or appears infected. Persistent pale mouth. A tortoise which has a known history of health problems or treatment e.g rns, trauma etc.
  - **SWOLLEN:** swollen limbs, eyes, ear area
  - **NOSE:** discharge. Nose can be stress of waking, so clear nose by pressing under pallet and wipe with a clear cloth. If the liquid is clear monitor your animal closely. Visit vet if normal feeding and character to resume. If the nose discharge is not clear an infection may be present and require veterinary help.
  - **EGGS:** Females will sometime carry over eggs to spring with no pre hibernation signs. They will sometimes deposit them on the surface post hibernation or even nest the eggs. Always give access to a nesting area post hibernation. If a female lays an egg(s) is feeding and active, you only need to monitor and ensure she remains hydrated.
  - **THIN & GAUNT:** Gaunt appearance and weight loss: this can be dangerous as a tortoise could have lost too much weight in hibernation and be weak and debilitated. Watch these cases carefully for change and seek medical support at nearest opportunity if the tortoise does not resume normal behaviour. A post hibernation tortoise can crash in health anything up to 2- 3 months post hibernation. Reptoboost, food journal and critical care is recommended in these cases.

#### SUMMARY

- ❖ Record charts throughout the year and especially around hibernation.
- ❖ Quickly recovery advised
- ❖ Raise temperature slowly
- ❖ Soaking daily
- ❖ Feeding within 2 weeks ( tempt and hand feed if needed)
- ❖ General recovery – observe carefully and keep notes
- ❖ Access to Indoor space your tortoise post hibernation if temperature below 15 c outside. Nesting spots for females, climbing areas, calcium block, choice of water dishes and feeding area are all advised. Access to outdoors – allow outdoors only for short period until weather improves. Please see enclosure design information sheet for more advice on this area.

#### Local Vets:

- **Toll Barns Vets**, Heath Rd, North Walsham NR28 0JB T: 01692 407126
- **Uplands Way Veterinary Clinic**, Uplands Way Diss, Norfolk IP22 4DF T: 01379 642 865
- **Animates Vets**, 4 Stamford Rd, Peterborough PE6 8AB T: 01778 380111

*We hope you find this information guide help. Contact us using information below. Happy tortoise Keeping.*