

Namaqualand Speckled Padloper (*Homopus signatus*)

Version 3

The following information is based on experience gathered within the studbooks coordinated by the Homopus Research Foundation.

Enclosure

The Namaqualand Speckled Padloper (*Homopus signatus*) is kept and bred successfully in enclosures measuring approximately 1 m² for three to four adult specimens. Males have been reported to show aggression amongst each other, but in some cases they did not. Regardless, it is recommended not to keep multiple males in breeding groups, as this would obscure genetic parent-offspring relationships. Males and females can be housed together year-round. Studbook terrariums are decorated to imitate the natural habitat of the tortoises, with a sandy soil containing loam to avoid compaction when ingested, wood stumps and (real or artificial) rocks, and sometimes (live or artificial) plants. It is essential that multiple hiding places are present, in which the tortoises can retreat. The animals show a preference for hiding places that are slightly higher than tortoise shell height, between rocks, but may also shelter at other sites. For adult females, an egg-laying site with a soil layer of at least 5-10 cm deep should be provided to allow nesting.

Enclosures need to be sprayed from time to time, preferably more often in winter (for instance twice or three times weekly) than in summer (for instance once weekly very lightly), to simulate the natural climatic cycle.

Juveniles are kept successfully in simple enclosures, starting at approximately 0.15 m² for two to three hatchlings. These enclosures are decorated with the same soil substrate as the adult enclosures and a (natural or artificial) hiding place. Hatchlings can be kept on newspaper substrate for the first week. Small and simple enclosures allow better observation and therefore increase the chance of survival of the tortoises.

Juvenile tortoises are sensitive to dehydration. In order to avoid this, they need to be sprayed more and with higher intensity than adults. A frequency of every other day for the first year, at least twice weekly for the second, and thereafter as for the adult tortoises is recommended. Soaking the hatchlings several times weekly may help to prevent dehydration.

Illumination/temperature

The enclosures described here are illuminated by means of daylight, tube lights, HID and (halogen or standard) light bulbs. Illumination may provide UV radiation, but this is not essential (if it is not provided, sufficient vitamin D has to be added to the diet). Since the light intensity in the natural distribution range is high, there appears to be no maximum light intensity in captivity. Care has to be taken to install at least one tube light or other lamp that emits a high light intensity, or to provide natural daylight.

The photoperiod needs to be adjusted to the natural distribution range. This means 13-14 hours in summer and 9-10 hours in winter, with a gradual shift between these two limits. Climatic cycle can be adjusted to northern or southern hemisphere.

Studbook terrariums contain light bulbs for heating, sometimes in combination with sun or soil heating. The day temperatures need to fluctuate with the season, for instance 30-35°C in summer and 20-25°C in winter. Night temperature should be lower than day temperature. There is no minimum night temperature, as long as the temperature remains above 0°C. The day temperature under a (standard or halogen) spot light or in sun needs to be higher, for instance 40°C or higher, to allow basking. This spot may be switched off for several weeks during winter.

Diet

The adult tortoises are mostly fed with green plant material (*Taraxacum*, *Plantago*, endive, chicory, et cetera), supplemented with a fiber-rich component such as chopped hay or soaked Heucobs. Food can be provided three times weekly. Fruit may be offered occasionally (for instance once weekly) in small quantities, but this is neither required nor recommended.

When the tortoises are inactive during warm episodes in summer or at low temperatures in winter, frequency of feeding may be reduced, although it is recommended to continue to offer food as some tortoises will become active now and then. Hatchlings need food more often, such as daily or every other day during the first weeks.

It is recommended to provide drinking water at all times, as the tortoises drink infrequently.

Supplements

The food is supplemented with a commercial calcium/vitamin additive at all feedings.

Situation in the wild and in captivity

Homopus signatus is uncommon in captivity, but not endangered in the wild. However, the natural distribution range is small and human pressure is increasing for various reasons. Therefore it is of importance to gather life-history information on the species (both in the wild and in captivity), allowing formulation of wildlife management plans if necessary. The majority of the European captive population of this species is registered in the studbook.

Literature

A detailed bibliography can be found at <http://www.homopus.org>, literature section.

Additional information

This caresheet was drawn up in May 2012. Husbandry and caring methods are dynamic and therefore it is recommended to check <http://www.homopus.org> for updates.