

# Red-Footed Tortoise

*Chelonoidis carbonaria*



## Physical Characteristics

- Physical Description: As its name suggests, the scales on the limbs and tail of the red-footed tortoise are reddish in color but can also range from yellow to dark reddish-brown. The carapace is dark brown to black-brown, with a bright yellowish highlight in the middle of each scute known as the areolae. The fringe of their carapace is also lighter in color, as well as some head scales.
- Sexual Dimorphism: Males are typically larger than females.
- Other Characteristics: Males have a larger posterior and anal notch.

## Size

- Length: 11-14 inches in length, but can reach up to 20 inches (510 mm).
- Weight: An adult male can weigh up to 20 lbs.

## Lifespan

- Wild: Up to 50 years or more.
- Zoos: 50 years or more.

## Behaviors

- Red-footed tortoises are diurnal, and tend to avoid moving long distances. Outside of reproduction, little is known about their behavior.
- Vocalizations: Juveniles may cluck or chirp while foraging. Males use a similar noise during courting and mating.
- Social Structure: Although the red-footed tortoise does not have a formal social hierarchy, the males establish their dominance through aggressive competitions which can decide breeding access.

## Diet

- Wild: Fruit and flowers make up the bulk of their diet, though they also consume living and dead foliage, fungi, stems, and even occasional carrion. Sometimes sand is also ingested to aid in digestion.
- Zoo: Mazuri small tortoise pellets, mixed greens.

## Reproduction

- Incubation/Gestation Period: 3-4 months, or approximately 116-160 days.
- Fledging/Parenting: Females deposit their clutch of white spherical eggs in a small, soil or sand-covered nest. Hatchlings are independent immediately upon hatching.
- Clutch/Litter Size: The female lays 2-15 eggs per clutch, and may nest and lay eggs several times in a single breeding season.
- Breeding Behaviors: In the wild, breeding season is June through September. In human care, their breeding season can be year-round. Sexual maturity is reached around 5 years of age, or once they reach 7"-10" (200-250mm) in length. Males compete for the right to mate by attempting to flip their competitors, establishing dominance.

## Habitat and Range

- Habitat: The red-footed tortoise prefers heavily forested areas, including rainforests, temperate forests, dry thorny forests and savannas. They also prefer to avoid muddy areas, as this makes burrowing more difficult.

- Range: This species has a wide range throughout South America, from Panama to Argentina. They can also be found on the Caribbean Islands.

### Conservation

- IUCN Status: Not Evaluated
- Contributing Factors: Red-footed tortoises are hunted for meat in their natural range. Though listed as “Not Evaluated” by the IUCN, their numbers are thought to be in decline from habitat loss and over-hunting.

### Classification

- Kingdom: Animalia
- Phylum: Chordata
- Class: Reptilia
- Order: Testudines
- Family: Testudinidae
- Genus: Chelonoidis
- Species: Chelonoidis carbonaria

### Interesting Facts

- The bony shell of the tortoise is constructed of fused ribs extending from their spine to form its carapace (topside) and its broad sternum forms its plastron (underside). Plate like scales referred to as scutes, cover the shell which, just like your fingernails, are made of keratin.
- As frugivores, red-footed tortoises play an important part in seed dispersal and the new growth of plants.
- The gender of hatchlings is dependent on incubation temperature. Lower temperatures produce males (around 82 degrees), while higher temperatures (88 degrees and higher) produce females. Incubation temperatures above 95 degrees tend to result in deformities, such as extra scutes.

