

Volume 19 / Issue 08 • OCTOBER 2019

Animal Scene

The Mystery
of **LAGUNA
MONITOR
LIZARDS**

ADOPTING
A **SENIOR
DOG**



Peninsula
**COOTER
TURTLE**

OCTOBER 2019

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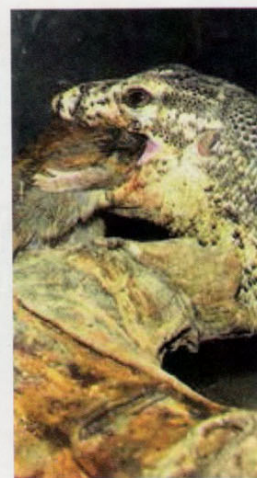
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All about
**PET
SITTING**

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THE
PENINSULA
COOTER
Turtle

By **CLIFF SAWIT**
Photos by **JEFFREY C. LIM**

**TAXONOMIC
INFORMATION**

Kingdom:	Animalia
Phylum:	Chordata
Class:	Reptilia
Order:	Testudines
Suborder:	Cryptodira
Family:	Emydidae
Genus:	Pseudemys
Species:	<i>P. peninsularis</i>

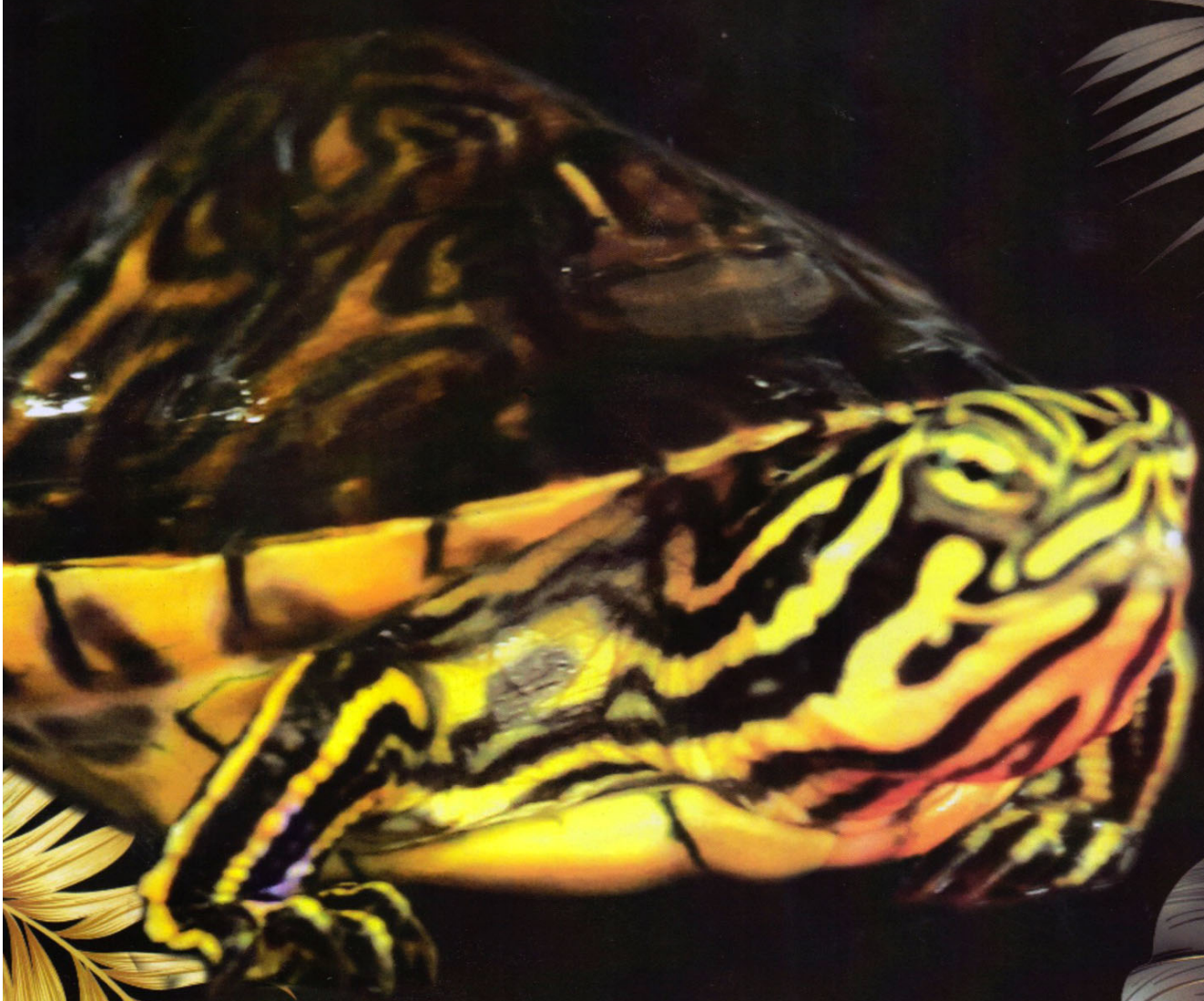


EATING THEIR GREENS

Found in the rivers, ponds, and lakes of peninsular Florida, the peninsular cooter (*Pseudemys peninsularis*) is a species of freshwater turtle in the genus *Pseudemys*. They are a very hardy species, and are mainly herbivores, although juveniles will sometimes eat fish and insects, then grow more vegetarian with age.

Animal Scene got in touch with someone who cares for a peninsula cooter to find out about the turtle's food. "I give my peninsula cooter turtle a variety of feeds for a balanced diet," he explains. "There are days when I offer turtle sticks, and other days where I'd offer fish (chopped *tawilis*)." Insects like crickets, dubia roaches, and small mealworms can also be offered as occasional snacks.

According to a 2019 article from Turtle Best, it is important during feeding to carefully move the turtle to a separate feeding container that also contains water (halfway as deep as your turtle is tall). This allows your turtle to skim and feed off the surface of the water, as it has evolved to do. It is important to do so in a separate container to keep the habitat from becoming too acidic.



TANKS FOR EVERYTHING

"Housing turtles properly is definitely the most important part of taking care of turtles," explains our source. "A huge enclosure should be provided, considering that the peninsula cooter is a large species. Giving them more

than ample space is healthy and good for their growth and development."

Water level is important and should be deep enough to allow them to swim freely. A ramp leading to a basking area is also a must, because the peninsula cooter loves to bask, especially in groups. The gap between the water surface level and the ramp should not be so big that it prevents the turtle from jumping in and out of the water with ease. "My ideal water level for my turtle enclosures is at least one foot," says our source, "because giving them a water level deep enough is ideal for their health and enjoyment. [This] species loves to swim."

Peninsula cooters spend most of their time in the water so keeping them warm and clean is a priority. They can be quite messy due to their high protein diet so they require quite a strong filter to keep them clean.

Water should always be treated before being introduced to the turtle's enclosure to remove the chlorine. If you do not do this, trace elements in tap water can disturb the biological pads in your filter and even affect the turtle. A constant temperature of 25 degrees Centigrade should be maintained day and night. A water heater can be used to keep the water warm, according to a 2019 article from Northampton Reptile Centre.

"Some setups do not have filters," says our source, "but the water will definitely get dirty faster than enclosures with filters." Water changes are another good way to keep the water clean, and different keepers follow different frequencies of changing their enclosure's water. "I personally do water changes for my turtles at least once or twice a week at around [a third] of the total water volume."

BASKING IN GLORY

If sunlight is inadequate or inaccessible, our source recommends heat sources, such as heat bulbs and UVB lamps. During the day, the peninsular turtle will periodically move to the basking area. This allows them to dry off, warm up, absorb UVB, and rest.

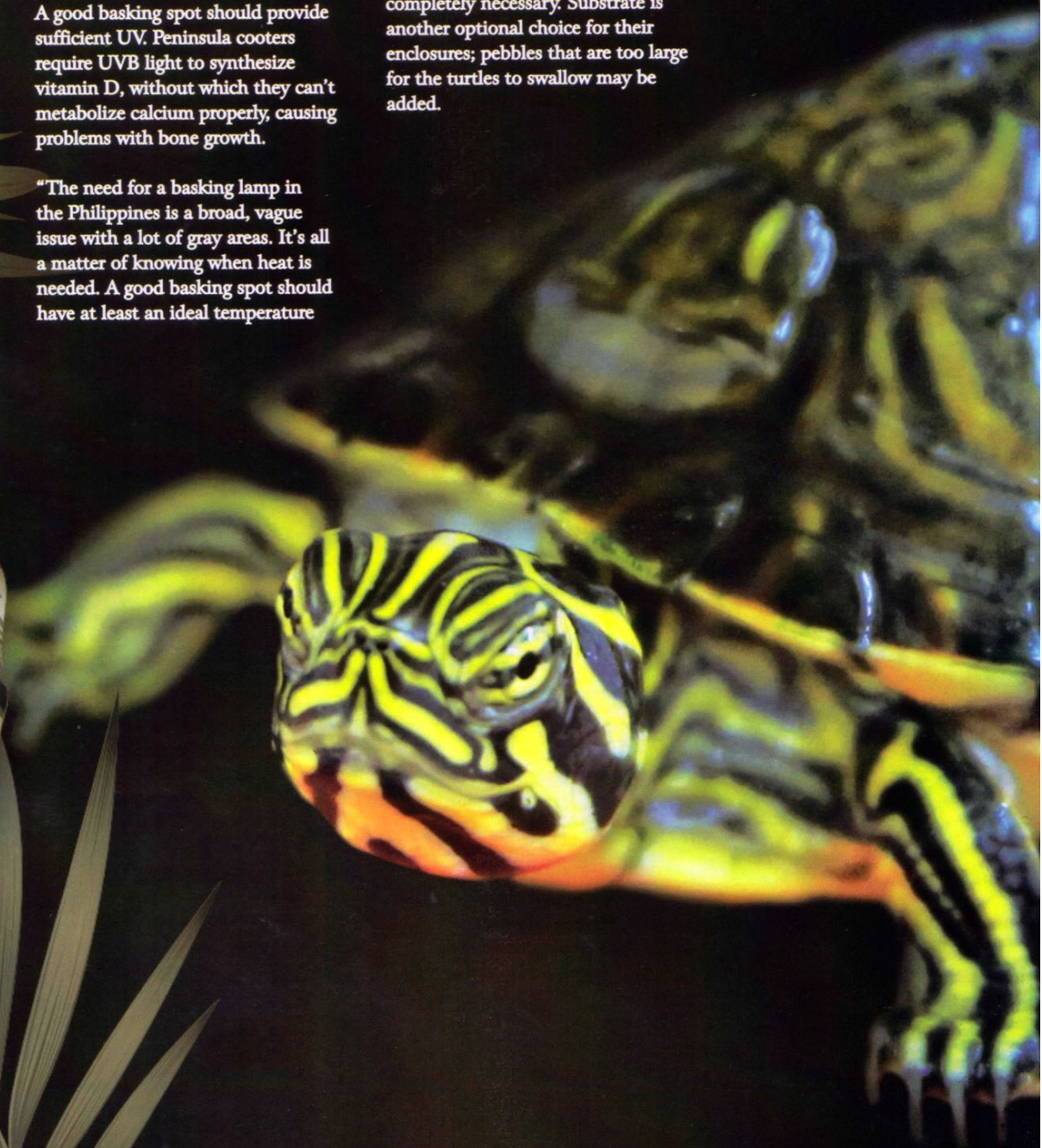
A good basking spot should provide sufficient UV. Peninsula cooters require UVB light to synthesize vitamin D, without which they can't metabolize calcium properly, causing problems with bone growth.

"The need for a basking lamp in the Philippines is a broad, vague issue with a lot of gray areas. It's all a matter of knowing when heat is needed. A good basking spot should have at least an ideal temperature

of 28-29 degrees Centigrade. When the weather is cold around your enclosure, you should be able to tell that a basking lamp [is needed]."

Our source explains that basking lamps do not need to be expensive. "Most of the keepers in the Philippines acquire and use incandescent lamps as heat bulbs."

As for decorations, most turtles love plants (real or fake), but they aren't completely necessary. Substrate is another optional choice for their enclosures; pebbles that are too large for the turtles to swallow may be added.





PILLARS OF THE COMMUNITY

The peninsula cooter turtle is an excellent community tank turtle. "I have other [companion animals] in the same area, which are red-footed tortoises," our source shares. "They don't get a chance to interact since the turtles are inside tanks and aquariums and the tortoises are crawling in my garden. In my

own experience, turtles require more time from me as they require higher maintenance compared to tortoises. However, turtles do not [require] high maintenance compared to other animals.

"I've given all my turtles and tortoises names, and I have no problem telling them apart. The key is to pay enough attention to [them], loving them, observing them, and giving them the attention they need."

THE SHELL GAME

Young peninsula cooter turtles are easy to distinguish from other turtles because of their remarkably beautiful shell patterns, along with their gorgeous head and neck stripe patterns. However, some turtles tend to have a darker or brownish shell as they grow into adulthood, and these patterns become less evident and visible.

Peninsula cooter turtles are a large species that can grow 16 inches or more. "You will also recognize that the peninsula cooter's body and shell is broad and looks 'macho'. It's a challenge to distinguish the peninsula cooter turtle from others because they are quite similar to some other species, such as the Florida cooter (*Pseudemys floridana*) and the river cooter (*Pseudemys cocinna*)." 