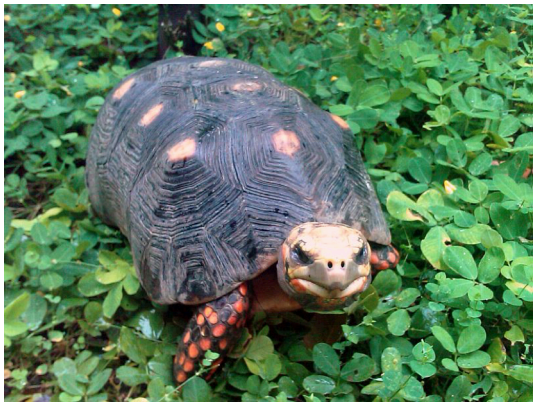
RED-FOOTED TORTOISE

Testudines
Family: Testudinidae
Genus: Chelonoidis
Species: carbonaria



Range: southern Central America and throughout much of South America.
Habitat: dry forest areas, grasslands and savannas
Niche: Terrestrial, diurnal, primarily herbivorous
Wild diet: fungi, live and dead plants or fruits, flowers, soil, sand, and slow moving animals such as snails, worms and insects that they can capture and carrion.
Zoo diet:
Life Span: Wild 40 - 50 years, Captivity 50+ years
Sexual dimorphism: males usually larger than females, have concave plastron and longer more distinct tail
Location in SF Zoo:

APPEARANCE & PHYSICAL ADAPTATIONS:

Red-footed tortoises are of medium size and have varying degrees of coloration, which varies according to locality of origin. The carapace of red-footed tortoises ranges from dark-brown to blackish brown. Adults exhibit a central narrowing of their shell. Each scute contains a yellow center. The plastron can range from pale to a dark yellow. Overall, the skin is mostly black. There are several bright red marks or scales on its head and lower jaw. The legs and tail often have patches or individual scales that are orange, yellow or red. As with other species of tortoise, male red-footed tortoises have a concave plastron.

Weight: up to 25 lbs

Length: M 13.5 in
F 11.25 in

Turtles and tortoises do not have ears but can respond to low frequencies. They depend on their other senses to help them find food or to avoid predators; they have an excellent sense of smell to help them find food. Additionally, turtles and tortoises don't have teeth. Instead, the outside of their mouth has a hard, sharpened edge that the turtle uses to bite and chew.

STATUS & CONSERVATION

Red-footed tortoises are not an endangered species. However, they are protected under Appendix II of the CITES. The biggest threat to the survival of red-footed tortoises is overhunting by man. Red-footed tortoises are considered a delicacy in many cities of South America and native people rely on their eggs as a major source of protein. The other threats to the survival of red-footed tortoises are loss of habitat and increasing demand of the pet trade. Some of the most popular pet tortoises in the United States are the red-footed tortoises of South America. Due to their slow rate of growth and maturation, red-footed tortoise populations cannot maintain sustainable levels with the presence of these threats.

COMMUNICATION AND OTHER BEHAVIOR

Red-footed tortoises are nomadic and follow available food sources.

Males produce sounds and calls associated with distinct gular motions that are meant to attract potential mates and ward off competitors. Calls consist of a series of “clucks”, similar to those produced by chickens. Males identify each other through a characteristic head movement that is a series of jerks away from and back to a middle position. Males will battle each other, attempting to turn over one another for the purpose to mate.

COURTSHIP AND YOUNG

Breeding occurs with the beginning of the rainy season. The female excavates a nest in leaf litter from July to September. During the nesting season, she might lay several clutches. As is the case with many reptiles, the eggs of red-footed tortoises are temperature sex dependent. Incubation periods with temperatures above 88° Fahrenheit (31° C) result in the hatching of females. Incubation periods with temperatures below 82° Fahrenheit (28° C) result in the hatching of males. At incubation temperatures between these ranges, mixed sexes will hatch.

Young hatchlings must find food quickly after birth, as they have little time to survive on the nutrients from their yolk or their time inside the egg. Like many other species of tortoises, red-footed tortoises grow slowly and do not become sexually mature until several years after hatching.

Incubation: 117 – 158 days	Length at birth: 1.5 – 1.75 in
# of eggs: 2 - 15	Sexual Maturity: 5 years

MISCELLANEOUS

The red-footed tortoise is one of three tortoises that are native to South America. The two other species are the Argentine tortoise (*G. chilensis*) and the yellow-footed tortoise (*G. denticulata* or *Chelonoidis denticulata*).

As frugivores, red-footed tortoises may be important dispersers of seeds of tropical plants such as figs and bromeliads.

While searching for food, several other animals may capture and eat red-footed tortoises, such as foxes, dogs, lizards, rats and skunks.

Sources:
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