



Weighing and Measuring a Tortoise

Regular weighing and measuring of the tortoise, and keeping records year to year are recommended for a number of reasons. In a young tortoise which is still growing, the weight and measurement can give a good indication of whether it is growing too fast or too slowly. For both young and older tortoises it is important to know whether the tortoise is a good weight for its size. This is especially important when considering whether or not to hibernate the tortoise. The records can also be a good indicator of health, and it's advisable to weigh newly acquired tortoises weekly. The vet would find the records very useful in the event that the tortoise needs treatment at any time.

To weigh and measure your tortoise, you will need the following:-

- Set of scales – digital scales which measure in 1gr. increments are best. Ordinary kitchen scales are ideal, are relatively inexpensive and easily available from places such as Argos.
- Small plastic plant pot or similar
- Ruler or tape measure
- Piece of A4 sized paper
- Pen or pencil
- Skirting Board or wall

Measuring the tortoise - SCL

A sheet of A4 paper should be placed on the floor touching the skirting board or wall.



The tortoise should be placed on the paper with its beak touching the skirting board, and then it should be gently but firmly pushed forwards until it retracts its head and front limbs.



Once the front of the shell is touching the wall, the position of the rear point of the shell should be marked on the paper.

The tortoise may not appreciate these efforts to measure it, and it can be surprisingly strong, so a good time to do this may be when it is a little colder and less active! The distance between the point on the wall to the mark made on the paper should then be measured with the ruler or tape measure to give the straight carapace length measurement.



Weighing the tortoise

Small tortoises can be placed directly onto the plate of the scales; however when the tortoise is a bit bigger, the legs may dangle over the edge and touch the ground, causing an inaccurate weight reading. To avoid this, the tortoise can be placed on a small flowerpot or similar, which will raise the animal up so that the legs are clear of the ground. Once the pot is placed on the scales the scale should be reset zero before the tortoise is placed on top, otherwise the weight of the flowerpot will be included in the reading.



Alternatively, the tortoise could be placed upside down on the scales – it only takes a couple of seconds to weigh the tortoise, and being upturned for such a short period of time will not cause it any harm or distress.



The Jackson Ratio

A useful tool to use for some tortoises is the Jacksons Ratio which is a method of comparing the weight of the tortoise against the length. It must be noted that the Jacksons Ratio only applies to *Testudo Hermannii* (Hermanns tortoises) and *Testudo Graeca* (Mediterranean Spur Thigh tortoises) and is not suitable for other species of tortoise. It requires that the



tortoise's weight in grammes is compared against the straight carapace length (SCL) in centimetres. The straight carapace length is measured from the front point of the shell to the rear point from underneath the tortoise – not over the top of the shell itself. The accepted method of measuring all tortoises is using the SCL method.

Keeping Records

The tortoise should be weighed once a month, more frequent weighings may give inaccurate information due to short term fluctuations in weight caused by things such as how full or empty the bowel or bladder is! SCL measurements can be taken less often, say once a quarter for young, growing tortoises, and once or twice a year for a mature tortoise. Paper records can be kept either in a notebook or on a spreadsheet on a PC.