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THAT TURTLE, GE

By LANCE CHERRY

LIBRARY OF
GEORGE H. BALAZS

Lance Cherry, of Honolulu, Hawaii, now 13 years old, has been an avid turtle fancier and collector since the age of 4. He has turtles from every continent except Australia. His interest was stimulated by a turtle collecting trip in the states in 1962 and was topped off by a visit to the Island of Tupai (near Bara Bara) in 1968.

- Gerald's ocean-going excursions occur in a shallow, protected sandy area from which he is not likely to escape. In case he tries, a long-handled net is used to bring him back from deep water. His regular pool is supplied with water collected at sea in 5-gallon bottles.

He was sleek and fat. Even though only three inches long, he was well on his way to becoming a big turtle. Gerald is a full-blooded Tahitian green turtle (*Chelonia mydas agassizzi*) hatched on the island of Motu Iti ("Little Island" in Tahitian) about 18 miles northeast of Bora Bora. Motu Iti is the center of the Society Islands for green turtle nesting. From September to January the beaches are spotted with baby turtles, all eager to reach the water first.

In May of 1968, I was fortunate enough to visit Motu Iti. There I met Gerald Garnier (the person for whom the turtle was named), manager of the 175,000-tree copra plantation. The big-French-Tahitian let me pick four fat turtles from a bin containing about fifty "montilings". The formula for feeding was fish and red hibiscus flowers. I brought the

turtles and the crazy formula back to Hawaii with me, and for a while Gerald thrived, but soon he began to get that "run down look." I began experimenting with new food. He ate everything except hamburger, horsemeat, and beef heart. Everything includes: Beef liver, chicken liver, shark liver, beef kidney, lean raw beef, and guppies.

Unfortunately, two of the turtles died from a strange disease. I learned later that the disease came from unclean water which makes them regurgitate. This further dirties the water and the turtle continues to regurgitate. Soon the poor creature is so empty that a side view shows no plastron. The disease is fatal unless the victim is placed in clean water immediately.

Gerald was King from the start. He was extremely active when taken from the water and calmed down only when caressed under the chin like a cat. Gerald is late to bed and early to rise.

At first the turtles all lived in one dishpan, but I found that they would chew on each other accidentally. Accidentally, because if they bumped into each other, one would open his mouth and clamp down on whatever was

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at hand, usually a flipper. This resulted in some badly mauled turtles. But things were not going too well for Gerald and during a cold spell in December he apparently became ill. I think it was pneumonia, but whatever it was I have never seen a worse outlook for a turtle in my life. Everyone we called said there was no chance for his survival. His once beautiful white plastron had shriveled up and turned purple. He was so weak he could hardly breathe. For nearly three months he was on the brink of death. Four days out of every week we took him to the beach to swim in the clean water. At first the water was too cold and he would crawl up onto the warm sand. Then the ocean warmed up a little and he swam playfully in the waves. Later, his plastron turned glossy and white. Gerald could breathe again!

We celebrated Gerald's first birthday on April 2, 1969, with a big piece of fish cake. His health restored, Gerald weighs over 2½ pounds and measures almost 10 inches from nose to tail. He happily patrols half of a small wading pool. His brother, Raiatea, commands the other half.

And so, Gerald, having multiplied his weight by almost 20 times, is well on his way to becoming a quarter-ton monster. Who knows how long he will be happy in his present environment... I certainly hope for a good many years.

TURTLE NOTES

Poison snail pellets or meal should never be put out in your garden where turtles or tortoises are kept. Some chelonians seem to enjoy a snail now and then and may be poisoned if they eat one that has come in contact with meal or pellets.

When transporting your turtle or tortoise in a cardboard box or similar container, line the bottom with several layers of "disposable diapers." As one layer becomes soiled and moist, simply remove it and throw away. The diaper has a plastic lining that keeps each layer dry.

Leaflets on turtle/tortoise care are available. For single set, please send long, stamped (6¢) self-addressed envelope. For shipment of 12 or more leaflets, a 25¢ stamp will help defray postage.

Rx Health Hints

MITE REMEDY

"... Mites, ticks, and chiggers commonly infest turtles as well as other reptiles, and their presence may cause much worry to the collector. A yellow rat snake that I kept was infested with hundreds of ticks. After I hung a 'No-Pest Strip' in its cage, all the ticks fell off and died. The Strip seems to do no harm to the animal; however, some collectors may be hesitant to use these, but if 2" sections of a 'Flea and Tick Dog Collar' are put in cages with turtles, tortoises, and snakes, etc., almost any mite, tick or chigger will be killed — and it will discourage others from infesting the animal. The sections must be replaced periodically since they lose their potency with time."

*R. Dietz
Springfield, Missouri*

LUNG CONGESTION

For lung congestion and as an appetite stimulant, liquid cortisone (obtained from your veterinarian), when added to a tortoise's drinking water, has been reported as beneficial. It is suggested that 2 or 3 drops in the drinking water is sufficient dosage for hatchlings. Consult your veterinarian for use of any medication.

ISOLATION CARE

Keep sick or injured turtles and tortoises in protected, warm (82-85° F.) areas. A paper-lined cardboard box can be easily disposed of at intervals. Also, you can line a plastic container with old, clean rags or several thicknesses of paper (such as newsprint) into which the pet can dig and burrow when it needs or wants to.

Remember that most rooms become cooler at night and that during these hours the box should be placed in a protected area, off the floor, and free of drafts. If a sick water turtle is kept in a small container with shallow water, the container may be set on top of the stove over pilot light area at night; always place a cake rack or trivet under container. Be sure to test this method beforehand; with turtle out of tank, to be certain that the water does not get too warm.