
TREATMENT OF FUNGUS IN TURTLES

ROMAN MURYN

SYMPTOMS

Fungus is not always easy to spot.



Here there is fungus on a Map turtle foot and as you can see in the picture it comes in patches. When in the water it often looks fluffy. It is mostly pale grey coloured but may be greenish, brownish or yellowish and this example would be easy to see out of the water.



Here's some fungus on a Spotted turtle foot. With this animal, once you take it out of the water and the leg is withdrawn there are no clues.

Fungus can manifest itself on the feet, in the nooks and crannies of joints- in fact anywhere on the skin. In my experience I have most often seen it on the feet.

When an animal has fungus often the affected limb is withdrawn so the fungus is not readily evident. Sometimes the first clue is that the animal is not moving normally and if you have many animals it's not always easily spotted.

As fungus takes hold of the animal, it then becomes very obvious because of the extended fluffy covering on the skin, by that time the animal is in serious danger. Initially it is on the surface but then with time it invades the body.

Turtles also normally shed skin, imagine what happens to humans when we get sun burnt and get peeling. It looks very similar and is normal. Skin shedding it is sometimes confused with fungus.

CAUSES

There are many causes of fungus and as with humans it can be transferred from person to person. Imagine athletes' foot and how that can be spread.

It is often stated that it's down to poor water conditions, well that may be that case but I do have good water conditions but have still had doses of fungus.

One cause I have recognised over time as a key contributor is stress. When I kept young Spotted and Painted turtles I raised them all in individual tubs and had no fungus outbreaks. It was only when they were put in the same enclosure together that the fungus showed up.

Consider that when the turtles hatch the youngsters have an instinct to disperse, this might be through some form of lack of tolerance/antagonism to each other so in the wild the drive is to get away and separate. As hatchlings in a small container they can't do that and it is my view that this contributes to stress levels. Spotted turtles seem more prone to getting it than my Painted turtles.

I know many who have kept young Spotted turtles and had similar problems, in my case resolving the stress fixed the fungus most effectively.

However good water condition is a prerequisite, so if you keep animals like spotted turtles that come from a soft water region start using rain water as a first step. I have found by accident that keeping my Spotted turtles in a high ph water system that they soon develop fungus, despite the water condition being good but just at an inappropriate ph. With rain water lower Ph is possible. However I have tried dropping the Ph with peat, leaves and tea bags and have been largely unsuccessful.

Likewise with Diamond Backed Terrapins check water salinity and an appropriate ph.

I have no issue with tap water that has been chlorinated provided it has had a chance to breathe and disperse the chlorine.

Salt is often recommended as a way forward. I have never used it so cannot comment.

Whilst I discuss medication below an equally important contributor to health is UVb light which is known to kill pathogens such as fungus and bacteria and should be provided along with a good basking position you must have both. UV strength should be at about UVI 2 - 5 and the temperature under the flood lit centre should be about 30 - 35c with the animal being able to dry out completely..

CURE

1. I take out everything that can carry the fungus spore. and give the tank and the filter a good vacuuming.
2. My tank is about 60litres, into that I put about 20ml of HiBiScrub (chemist) - this is an antiseptic (an alternative is Nolvasan). It contains Chlorhexidene acetate 2%. It's used in hospitals for scrubbing down. I run the filter for about half an hour and generally make sure everything is soaked in the stuff. I then drain it all. I take out any particles of crud. I refill with rain water and bring up to temperature.
3. Each animal that was in the tank is dried off and placed into its own box with a bit of tissue on the bottom. Every animal is treated with Clotrimazole by Canesten (chemist). This is a common antifungal treatment. I apply the medication simply by dripping it into each of the four corners and let it soak in between the joints. You don't need much. I leave them in their box for about 3 hours.
4. Once the water is warmed up I give it a dose of Protozin (pet shop) which is used as a general water treatment for fungus. The dosage is on the bottle.
5. After treatment I put all the animals into the new water.
6. On day 2 I repeat the Protazin dose. I also treat the animals with the fungal infection again as before.
7. On day 3 I repeat day 2
8. On day 4 I repeat day 3
9. On day 5 I do nothing.
10. On day 6 I repeat the Protazin.
11. By day 6 the fungus should have dropped off and signs of skin flaking may occur as part of repair process.
12. By day 10 turts should be moving about and eating as normal.

Note more recently in light infections a dry docking with Clotrimazole applied over a few days has also worked.