

A Help Guide for At-Risk Morrocoys in Trinidad and Tobago



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SCHOOL OF VETERINARY
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Introduction

This guide is intended for anyone who would like to help Morrocoys live healthier and happier lives in Trinidad and Tobago and the wider Caribbean. It has been produced as a collaboration between the Nurture Nature Campaign (www.nurturenaturett.org), the Trinidad and Tobago Veterinary Association (TTVA), the Veterinary Students Association of Trinidad and Tobago (VSATT), and the Exotics Club at the University of the West Indies School of Veterinary Medicine.

We offer you this guide as many Trinbagonian Morrocoy keepers—and perhaps even you—now unfortunately participate in a harmful wildlife trade spanning the Southern Caribbean. In fact, trade research done by local and international investigators conservatively estimates that there are more than 3,000 captive Morrocoys in Trinidad and Tobago, almost all of which have been poached, trafficked, and illegally sold before ending up in everyday homes. Sadly, it is now difficult to find indigenous Yellow-footed Morrocoys in the wilds of Trinidad, and a great many Morrocoys die young in captivity and never get a chance to breed to continue their species.

Though the situation facing our Morrocoys is dire, we also know that positive change for these reptiles and other wildlife is possible. There are several examples in the Caribbean that show we can do better. Notably, since the 1970s, St. Lucians have made big changes in how they protect their native and endemic St. Lucian parrot, and this has likely prevented its extinction. Meanwhile, conservationists in Brazil are developing programs to repopulate their forests with native Yellow-footed and Red-footed Morrocoys.

If you want to stop participating in the harmful wildlife trade, and maybe help end the trade, then this guide is for you. As you will learn, any keeper who wants to make a change should first “Get to Know Your Morrocoy” and learn how to “Give Short-term Care”. And if you are ready, you can even “Be a Morrocoy Rescuer” to best support the welfare of your tortoise.

Get to Know Your Morrocoy

The first step in helping any at-risk Morrocoy in captivity is to get to know the animal better. With knowledge comes power. You may be surprised to learn that many keepers do not know there are two species of Morrocoy that are commonly traded in Trinidad and Tobago: the Yellow-footed Tortoise and Red-footed Tortoise. You may also find it interesting to know about these animals' natural lives in the wild or how they are unfortunately impacted by the pet wildlife trade.

Yellow-footed and Red-footed Tortoises

The two most common “pet” tortoises, or “Morrocoys” are the Yellow-footed Tortoise (*Chelonoidis denticulata*) and Red-footed Tortoise (*Chelonoidis carbonaria*). Both species are native to South America, including Ecuador, Peru, Guyana, Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, and Venezuela, and have been introduced to the Caribbean.



Yellow-footed Tortoise (right) and Red-footed Tortoise (left). Both are known as Morrocoy in Trinidad and Tobago.

Photo Credit: Charlotte Bleijenberg (right) and Ondrej Prosicky (left).

It is thought that the Yellow-footed Tortoise might be native to Trinidad and Tobago, while the Red-footed Tortoise may have been introduced hundreds of years ago. The trade of these reptiles in the Southern Caribbean stretches back centuries, if not millennia, but today's trade occurs in much greater volumes than in the past, threatening wild populations.

The Yellow-footed Tortoise gets its name from the yellow to orange scales that cover its legs. It is the largest tortoise on the South American mainland and the sixth largest tortoise on Earth. Their average body length is 14in long, but some can reach 24 to 37in or more in the wild. The Red-footed Tortoise is named for the red scales on its limbs and grows to a smaller 13.5in in body length.

In general, male Morrocoys grow slightly larger than females. Males are identifiable by the deeply concave plastron (lower belly shell), while females have flat or slightly rounded plastron. Males typically have longer, more muscular tails, while the tails of females are shorter and cone shaped. Male Morrocoys also typically have a larger anal notch to allow better mobility of the tail.



Map showing the countries where Yellow-footed and Red-footed Tortoises are found in South America. Image Credit: The Nurture Nature Campaign.

Life in the Wild

Morrocoys live in or near dry and wet forests, savannahs, and grasslands. The Red-footed Tortoise may be more likely to be found in grasslands and adjacent forests, while the Yellow-footed Tortoise prefers to live deeper in the forest. They are both diurnal and spend a great deal of time around bodies of water and other moisture sources.



Yellow-footed Tortoise (Morrocoy) in the wild. Photo Credit: Leo Mercon.

Morrocoys mate year-round. They start to reproduce when they reach maturity at 8-10 years old. A male tortoise makes head movements when encountering other males. This behaviour is absent in females. As part of the mating ritual, male tortoises also swing their heads back and forth in a continuous rhythm.



The number of eggs in a clutch will depend on the female's size--- the bigger a female Morrocoy is, the more eggs she can produce. Two clutches may be produced per season, but some females may not produce every year. Females lay and bury eggs in a nest she has made or in the leaf litter of the rainforest floor. The average incubation period is about 136 days (128 to 152 days). Newly hatched baby tortoises are independent and will start foraging for food. There is no parental care of the young and the baby tortoises will fend for themselves, starting by eating calcium-rich plant matter.

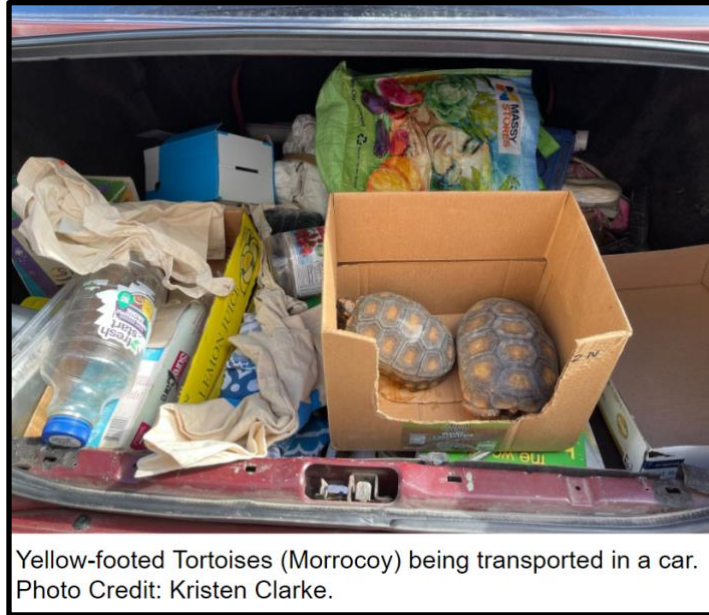
As omnivores, Morrocoys seek diets that include fallen fruits, flowers, vegetables, mushrooms, insects, and carrion. Fruits remain ordinarily comprise up to 70% of the total intake during the wet season and approximately 40% during the dry season. Fruits are normally consumed in a very ripe state after falling from the tree.

Morrocoys can make heavy rhythmic breathing sounds, described as a baby cooing with a raspy voice. During mating calls, males also make a variety of clicks, clucks, and grunts.

The Harmful Pet Wildlife Trade

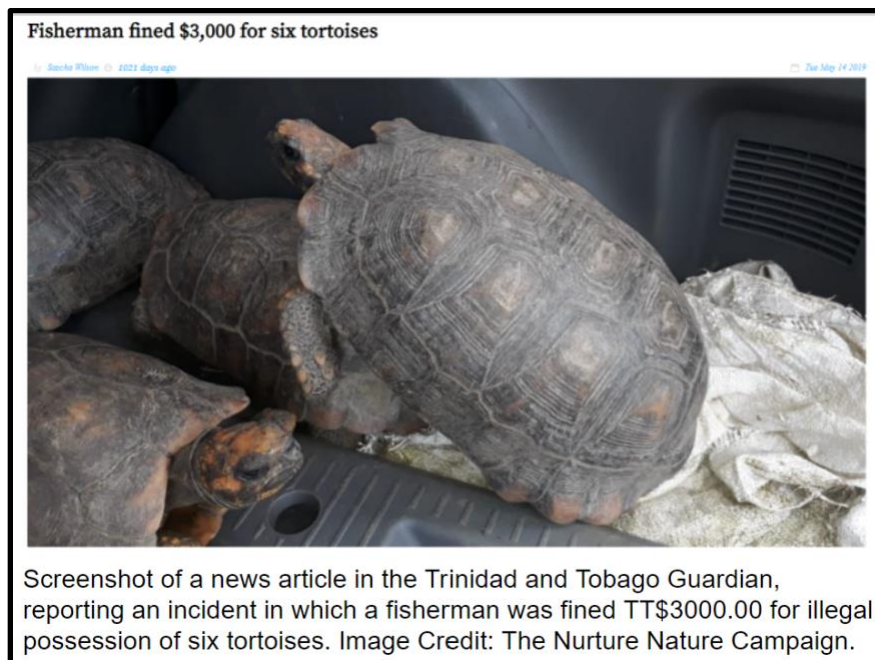
The pet wildlife trade in Trinidad and Tobago and the wider Southern Caribbean causes many harms to Red-footed and Yellow-footed Morrocoys. This includes the long-term mistreatment and premature death of Morrocoys, as well as the breaking of many local and international laws.

In Trinidad and Tobago, Morrocoys kept as pets are almost always caught through the poaching of tortoises from their homes in the forest. This can happen locally in Trinidad or Tobago, but most commonly, it occurs in nearby Venezuela. In both places, the hunting of Morrocoys is restricted by law. Worse still, poachers are typically heartless and expect some tortoises to die in the poaching process. Poachers will keep tortoises in boxes and crocus bags, without water, food, or appropriate temperatures, resulting in many deaths.



Yellow-footed Tortoises (Morrocoy) being transported in a car.
Photo Credit: Kristen Clarke.

Morrocoys poached in Venezuela are also trafficked to Trinidad and Tobago under terrible conditions. Crowded and unsanitary boats or sacks are filled to capacity with tortoises and a range of other wildlife to capitalise on the smuggling trade. The experience leaves many animals sick, injured, or dead. By law, owning an imported Morrocoys requires a permit in accordance with the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES) as well the tortoise must be quarantined to prevent disease introduction.



Screenshot of a news article in the Trinidad and Tobago Guardian, reporting an incident in which a fisherman was fined TT\$3000.00 for illegal possession of six tortoises. Image Credit: The Nurture Nature Campaign.

As a result of this illegal and harmful trade, Morrocoys are threatened with extinction. Yellow-footed Morrocoys are listed as “vulnerable” to extinction by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN). The vulnerability status of Red-footed Morrocoys has not yet been formally assessed, but many biologists believe their numbers are declining because of the same hunting threats facing Yellow-footed Morrocoys.

Finally, the buyers of Morrocoys often do not understand the care requirements of their new pets, and this results in malnutrition, disease, and early death. In fact, few Morrocoys ever live past 15 years old, let alone to the full 50 years they might have with appropriate long-term care in captivity. One of the most common problems is that tortoises are given insufficient diets, which causes serious nutritional deficiencies.

Give Short-term Care

The next step in helping a captive, at-risk Morrocoy is to ensure it gets the minimum necessary care to be healthy and happy in the short term. Unfortunately, in Trinidad and Tobago, many Morrocoys do not ever receive such basic care, so they can suffer serious traumas, diseases, and early death.

If a Morrocoy keeper wants to do the right thing, we recommend that they pay attention to providing six things in the short-term:

- 1) appropriate enclosure
- 2) healthy food and water
- 3) regular cleaning and bathing
- 4) mental health support
- 5) safety in the household, and
- 6) veterinary care.

Appropriate Enclosure

Tortoises kept in captivity require spacious enclosures because they are generally active reptiles. They will thrive having both indoor and outdoor facilities. This is an important consideration when you have a tortoise as a pet.

Tortoises kept for extended periods in classic terrarium enclosures (i.e., dry aquariums) do not tend to do well. Such tiny enclosures are inhumane and can pave the way for serious health issues down the road. However, hatchling and juvenile Morrocoys can be comfortably housed in a 20-gallon glass terrarium or moulded plastic cages until they grow bigger. As your Morrocoy continues to grow, it will need a larger enclosure. For an average size adult tortoise, at least an 8ft by 4ft enclosure will provide minimal space for your pet to roam around.

Place a layer of substrate on the floor of the enclosure. The materials should promote adequate humidity but should be easy to clean and allow your Morrocoy to burrow. An ideal combination would be a 50/50 mix of coco coir and organic soil to help maintain the proper humidity inside the enclosure.

A reptile heat lamp (100 watts) installed on one end of the enclosure will serve as the basking area. Maintain the temperature in the basking area at 32°C. Putting a thermometer in this area can help you keep track of the temperature. The other end of the enclosure, away from the basking area, can be used as a cooler area with a hiding

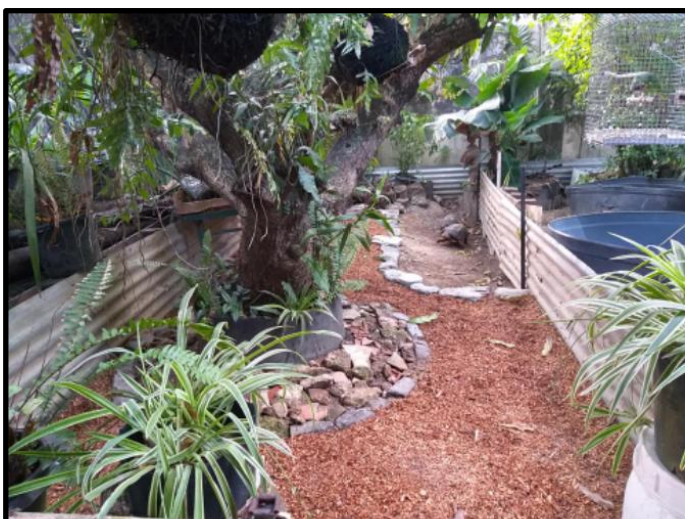
place for your tortoise. Providing several hiding places away from the basking spot can help make your pet feel secure and comfortable.

An exclusively indoor enclosure will also need a full spectrum fluorescent light to provide Ultraviolet B (UVB) light. This is necessary for the synthesis of vitamin D3, which is essential for metabolism. UVB light is found naturally in sunlight. Make sure that your Morrocoy has access to full spectrum lighting for 10-12 hrs daily. This can help prevent the development of severe and often fatal metabolic issues.



Terrariums for hatchling or juvenile Morrocoys must have a basking area warmed by a reptile heat lamp, and a full spectrum fluorescent light to provide UVB light. Photo Credit: Paul Williams.

Housing your Morrocoy outdoors is highly recommended. Make sure your outdoor enclosure is sufficiently protected from predators and has walls high enough to prevent escape. Secure the perimeter with a strong wire mesh that is partially buried to prevent predators from burrowing in and your Morrocoy from burrowing out. Pay close attention to corners as these are common avenues of escape. The perimeter walls should be about twice as high as your tortoise. A completely opaque and solid perimeter is ideal because a tortoise will be very keen to get through a barrier that they can see through.



Outdoor Tortoise enclosure.
Photo Credit: The Foundation for Heritage Preservation and Legacy Creation.

A Morrocoy's enclosure can be made of a variety of materials such as stone, concrete blocks, brick, or treated timbers. A child's sandpit can be used for a smaller or juvenile Morrocoy. A heated night house will provide your tortoise shelter from cold nights and bad weather. Place some low bushes and other plants that block the sun and provide comfortable retreats for your pet. Ideally, there should be slopes and contours to give the tortoise a variety of surfaces to engage in normal behaviour and

exercise. Strategically placed rocks and vegetation can help your Morrocoy get right itself up in case it accidentally turns over. This can be very difficult on flat surfaces. Staying inverted and being exposed to the sun can cause death from overheating.

Morrocoys come from tropical rainforests with very high humidity levels. An automated dripper system or regular misting should be installed in outdoor enclosures to ensure that your Morrocoy doesn't get too dry during the hotter months. You should aim to keep the humidity levels at around 80% and can use a hygrometer in the enclosure to help monitor humidity levels. Make sure that the enclosure's substrate can dry fully each day and is well-drained to help prevent shell and respiratory infections. Remember that unlike their wild counterparts, captive Morrocoys cannot simply move away from areas contaminated with bacteria and other pathogens.

Healthy Food and Water

Soaking is very important for tortoises. Spending time in the water helps keep your Morrocoy hydrated as water is absorbed through their cloaca. To meet this need, place a dish or pool inside your enclosure. The dish or pool must be shallow enough to prevent your Morrocoy from drowning but big enough so the tortoise can soak in it. Make sure to clean the water frequently since the tortoise may defecate in it.



Red-footed Tortoise (Morrocoy) enjoying a soak.
Photo Credit: The Foundation for Heritage
Preservation & Legacy Creation.

Morrocoys need lots of water due to the protein in their diet. In addition to soaking, providing your pet with a proper drinking pan or bowl can help prevent dehydration. The water receptacle must be sturdy and easy to clean.

In the wild, tortoises are opportunistic omnivores that find most of their food through scavenging. In captivity, a healthy diet for Morrocoys is mostly a mix of leafy greens and fruits, with some protein (Pollock, 2011). There are also commercial food products that are specially formulated for tortoises.

Variety is very important to keep mealtimes interesting and to provide a healthy mixture of nutrients. Avoid giving citrus and fruits that contain too much water as these can cause digestive problems. To meet the tortoise's protein needs, offer pinkie mice

carcasses or live earthworms at least twice a month (Heinen, 2007). Other good sources of protein for Morrocoys in captivity include snails, mealworms, hard-boiled eggs, and lean ground turkey. Morrocoys that are not fed protein may develop serious conditions such as paralysis.

Many common human foods and even some garden flowers are unhealthy or even toxic to Morrocoys. It is important to keep this in mind when planning meals or letting Morrocoys roam your garden.

Tortoise Food Groups	Some Good Foods	Notes
Leafy Greens	Arugula, Carrot tops, Cilantro, Endive, Escarole, Kale, Mustard greens, Radish greens, Romaine lettuce, Turnip greens	
Vegetables	Basil, Cactus pad, Carrots, Celery, Corn, Eggplant, Okra, Parsley, Squash, Summer squash, Sweet potatoes, Zucchini	Carrots should be given in moderation because they are high in sugar.
Flowers	Dandelions, Hibiscus, Rose petals	Other flowers that are generally safe for human consumption may also be suitable. Avoid commercially bought flowers and other flowers that may have been exposed to pesticides.
Fruits	Apples, Bananas, Cantaloupes, Kiwis, Mangos, Mixed berries, Papayas, Peaches, Strawberries	Apple seeds should be removed.
Animal Protein sources	Calciworms, Earthworms, Eggs, Mealworms, Pinkie mice, Silkworms, Snails	Animal protein is vital for good health in Red-footed and Yellow-footed Tortoises. Make sure your tortoise gets enough of it.



Examples of appropriate Morrocoy foods and proportions. Photo Credit: The Foundation for Heritage Preservation & Legacy Creation.

Some Unhealthy or Toxic Foods (Do Not Feed to Tortoises)	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> All Peppers Apple Seeds Bird of Paradise Bottlebrush (a tree or shrub) Broccoli Calla Lily Christmas Cactus Dieffenbachia (a common houseplant) Garlic Impatiens (a type of flowering garden plant) Iris Jasmine Marijuana Milkweed 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Oleander Onion Poinsettia Potato leaves Rhododendron Sage Snapdragon Spinach Tomato leaves Tulip Verbena Wisteria

Juvenile Morrocoys should be offered food daily or every other day. As a guideline, a growing tortoise should eat a pile of food as big as they are within a 24-hour period. Older tortoises should be offered food at least 3 times a week or every other day. Any food that is not consumed should be removed to prevent access to mouldy or stale food.

Before offering food to a growing tortoise, dust it lightly with a good calcium/vitamin supplement at every feeding. For adults, dusting can be done once or twice a week. Make sure the supplement contains adequate amounts of vitamin D3.

Regular Cleaning and Bathing

Give your tortoise baths to ensure good hygiene. Juveniles should be given a daily bath, and adults at least once a week.

To bathe your Morrocoy, fill a shallow container with lukewarm water. The size of the container will depend on the size of your tortoise. Remember, tortoises cannot swim. The water must be about chin deep, so the head of the tortoise is above the water. The container must be big enough to accommodate the tortoise, but the sides must not be too high so it will be easier for your pet to climb out of it. Let your tortoise soak for at least 20 minutes to give it enough time to rehydrate and clean itself.



Morrocoy enjoying bath time. Photo Credit: The Foundation for Heritage Preservation & Legacy Creation.

Next, take your tortoise out of the basin and discard the water in the toilet to avoid the spreading of disease-causing pathogens. Use a towel to dry the tortoise off. Gently rub the shell to remove the water and pat the tortoise's head, arms, and legs. Be sure to dry off every nook and cranny in your tortoise's body before returning it to its enclosure.

Bathing should be done at least once a week, especially if the humidity is low. If your tortoise is in an outdoor enclosure, soaking twice a week will be beneficial.

Your tortoise will also benefit from a light scrubbing every 2-3 weeks. Before scrubbing the tortoise, let it soak first to allow rehydration of its water reserves. After 20 minutes, use an old, clean toothbrush to gently scrub the tortoise's shell, making sure to clean all the crevices. Next, brush the legs, arms, and head, making sure to be extra gentle on

areas with no scales. Avoid using soap, detergents, and commercial shell cleaners. These products may contain ingredients that can be harmful or even kill your pet.

After scrubbing, gently pour water over the tortoise to wash off the dirt and grime. Dry off your tortoise using a soft towel before placing your pet back to its enclosure.

Bathing your tortoise is also an opportunity to check your pet's body for any abnormalities that should be brought to the attention of your veterinarian.

Mental Health Support

Morrocoys thrive with adequate physical and mental stimulation. Without such stimulation, they can get bored, depressed, anxious, stressed, and even aggressive. In the wild, they are nomadic foragers, exploring miles of the rainforest floor and playing with objects that catch their fancy.

You should aim to create an environment that encourages and feeds your tortoise's natural behaviours and instincts to support their health and well-being. Provide lots of opportunities for enrichment by providing:

- A varied and colourful diet
- Regular interactions with your tortoise
- Tortoise-safe toys and furniture
- Objects to climb on, such as one or more large, flat rocks, a chunk or two of wood, big branches, or cardboard boxes
- Hiding places of different types -- moist, dry, dark, with multiple exits, etc.
- 'Treat toys,' which are toys that you place food inside so that the animal must figure out how to remove it.
- Digging spots, using dirt that is not too wet, sand that is not too dry, or damp moss
- Small rocks that can be pushed around piled up and which are bigger than the tortoise's head to avoid accidental consumption
- Treasure hunts by hiding small shells, pebbles, or aquarium rocks in gravel or loose bedding
- Scratching posts to stimulate nerve endings in the Morrocoy's shell and help remove old skin and scutes



Red-footed Tortoises need stimulating environments where they can dig, climb and interact with objects.
Photo Credit: LaggedOnUser via Flickr.

Safety in the Household

When housed outdoors, make sure that your Morrocoy's enclosure offers optimum protection from weather extremes, predators, and is escape-proof.

If the outdoor enclosure is on grass, make sure that herbicides or pesticides are not used. Also, check the area and its surroundings for ants, particularly fire ants, because they can kill tortoises.

If you have other pets in your home, it is a good idea to have them get to know each other. However, you should always monitor them closely when in each other's company. Never leave your Morrocoy with your dog for a minute, even if your dog is very friendly. Some dogs may mistake the tortoise for a toy and play rough or chew on it. Some Morrocoys are also surprisingly aggressive and can hurt a dog or cat with their strong bite.

Like other reptiles, Morrocoys can carry salmonella, a type of bacteria that can cause disease in animals and humans. Always wash your hands after handling your pet or items from their enclosure.

Veterinary Care

Every “pet” Morrocoy needs to be seen by a veterinarian who has experience with tortoises. Your Morrocoy needs to undergo a general check-up as well as blood work and a faecal exam. This first health and wellness check is very important since, like other reptiles, Morrocoys often carry disease, and this is even more likely if they have been trafficked from South America.



Here are some important indicators of good health in Morrocoys:

- Clean skin, scales, beak, and vent
- Alert and responsive awareness.
- An absence of mites and other parasites.
- Clear and bright eyes without discharge.
- An absence of objects or discharge from the nose.
- Easy breathing through the nose with a closed mouth, and absence of wheezing or strange sounds.
- Smooth and firm upper and lower shells, free of any damage or scute pyramiding.
- Strong and muscular legs that allow the tortoise to lift itself from the ground.

Most health issues in captive Morrocoys are a result of poor living conditions and improper management. Any concern you may have about your pet’s health and

behaviour should prompt a visit to your veterinarian for proper attention and intervention.

Common Health Issues of Morrocoys in Captivity	
Metabolic Bone Disease (MBD)	Also referred to as nutritional secondary hyperparathyroidism (NSHP), this disease is characterised by soft or deformed shells. The condition is brought about by a lack of calcium in the diet, or the Morrocoy may have a problem absorbing dietary calcium. Sufficient exposure to a full-spectrum light source and a calcium-rich diet can help prevent MBD. Lightly dusting your Morrocoy's food with a powdered vitamin/mineral supplement adds much-needed calcium to the diet.
Respiratory Infection	Such diseases are very common in Morrocoys, especially those that are wild-caught and purchased from the pet trade. Captive-raised tortoises also have a higher chance of developing respiratory infections with poor nutrition and improper care.
Prolapse	This problem occurs when tissues of the digestive tract, reproductive system, and/or the bladder droop out of the tortoise's cloacal opening. Any tissue that's exposed to the environment becomes dry or damaged, thus you should take your Morrocoy to a veterinarian ASAP.
Beak Overgrowth	An overgrown tortoise beak can be caused by nutritional secondary hyperparathyroid disease (a form of metabolic bone disease), malocclusion, inappropriate food items (usually all soft foods), and trauma.
Shell Rot	Shell rot occurs when the bacteria found in the Morrocoy's environment infect the blood vessels in the shell of a turtle. This will eventually cause small pits and divots in their shell and give their shell a moth-eaten appearance. You may also start to see soft spots forming or even have small areas of bloody discharge.
Obesity	Obesity among tortoises is characterised by fat deposits around the eyes, on the limbs, and the neck. A fat chelonian generally looks too big for its shell. Obesity comes with many health risks. It affects the tortoise's innate ability to retract into its shell and makes it difficult for the tortoise to breathe.
Dehydration.	Tortoises that are dehydrated usually feel lighter, their eyes will appear sunken in their sockets, their rear legs and neck area may appear very skinny, and they may also look as though they are "crying".



Yellow-footed Tortoises (Morrocoy) with a smooth, healthy shell (far left) and slight pyramiding (centre left), and Red-footed Tortoises with advanced (centre right) and severe (far right) pyramiding. Pyramiding is a serious deformity that can be caused by any of a variety of nutritional or environmental problems. Tortoises suffering pyramiding should be seen by a veterinarian.

Photo Credit: The Foundation for Heritage Preservation & Legacy Creation (far left), Barloventomagico (centre left), Paul Ritchie (centre right), Anonymous (far right).

Be a Morrocoy Rescuer

A third and most important final step in helping a captive Morrocoy is to start supporting this animal's long-term well-being and that of other wild animals. Our advice at the Nurture Nature Campaign is that you consider becoming a "Morrocoy Rescuer" by taking three specific actions.

Action #1: Don't Release This Animal

Do not release this animal into the wild if you think you can no longer care for it. Captive Morrocoys typically require special rehabilitation if they are to be returned to the wild and survive there. This rehabilitation includes teaching the tortoise to forage and interact with its own species and sometimes many months of training to rebuild their muscles and improve their overall health.

Action #2: Relinquish, or Get a Permit and Give Long-term Care

If you are truly committed to giving this animal the best long-term quality of life, you have only two meaningful options.

Option 1 is to relinquish your tortoise to a rehabilitation centre, of which there are several in Trinidad and Tobago. In fact, two of our NGO coalition members are wildlife rehabilitation centres: the El Socorro Centre for Wildlife Conservation in Trinidad, and Corbin Local Wildlife Park in Tobago.

Location	Rehabilitation Centre	Phone	Website
Trinidad	El Socorro Centre for Wildlife Conservation	1 868-366-4369	www.wildliferescuett.org
	Foundation for Heritage Preservation and Legacy Creation	1 868-758-1823	https://www.facebook.com/The-Foundation-for-Heritage-Preservation-Legacy-Creation-350051685718274
Tobago	Corbin Local Wildlife Park	1 868-327-4182	www.tobagowildlife.org

Option 2 is to commit to legal and high-quality care for the at-risk Morrocoy now in your home. It is possible to apply and receive a government permit to have a Morrocoy, but only if the tortoise is well cared for. You can contact your local government agency for information on how to apply.

Meanwhile, appropriate long-term care would require that you establish a care plan with a veterinarian and that you construct a large enclosure to let the tortoise actively roam.

Location	Office	Phone	Website
Trinidad	The Wildlife Section of the Forestry Division at the Ministry of Agriculture, Land, and Fisheries	1 868-225-3837	https://agriculture.gov.tt/divisions-units/divisions/forestry-division/permits-keep-protected-animals/
Tobago	The Division of Food Security, Natural Resources, the Environment, and Sustainable Development	1 868-639-1966 1 868-639-2234	https://www.tha.gov.tt/divisions/food-security-natural-resources-the-environment-and-sustainable-development

Action #3: Stop Buying Wild Animals

The best way to do justice to your Morrocoy is to make sure that other animals like it are never again harmed by the wildlife trade. For every one Morrocoy that survives the brutal and uncaring trade, many more will have suffered terribly and have died unnaturally young.

To stop the trade, you must commit yourself to stop buying wild-caught Morrocoys. If you must have a pet, we suggest you consider adopting one of the many incredible dogs and cats just waiting to be adopted at the local shelter. You can contact your nearest shelter by consulting the table below.

Location	Organisation/Shelter	Contact
Trinidad	Animal Welfare Network (AWN)	Phone: 1 868-269-4296 Facebook Direct Message: @AnimalWelfareNetwork
	Animals 360 Foundation	Phone: 1 868-364-7729 Facebook Direct Message: @animals360foundation
	Animals Alive	Phone: 1 868-709-1151 Facebook Direct Message: @AnimalsAliveTT
	Trinidad and Tobago Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (TTSPCA)	Phone: 1 868-622-1367 1 868-628-1615
Tobago	Trinidad and Tobago Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (TTSPCA)	Phone: 1 868-639-2567
	Venus Doggess of Love	Email: venusdoggessofoflove@gmail.com Facebook Direct Message: @VenusDoggessOfLove

Conclusion

In closing, there are many ways that you can help at-risk Morrocoys in Trinidad and Tobago.

You can get to know your Morrocoy better and appreciate how it is an important part of our natural world or how so many Morrocoys have been harmfully trafficked from the wild. Few people realise that many Morrocoys do not survive the harrowing experience of poaching and trafficking, and that the Yellow-footed tortoise is now threatened with extinction.

You can learn about appropriate short-term care practices to ensure that your own Morrocoy is free from any immediate danger. As you may have learned, caring for Morrocoys is complicated and involves many considerations, from providing enclosures and nutrition to cleaning and mental health support to special safety precautions and veterinary care.

You can also become a Morrocoy rescuer by taking the best steps for your tortoise's long-term welfare. This includes seeing that the tortoise receives proper care by establishing a long-term care plan with a veterinarian and by obtaining a government possession permit. You can also make sure you will never again support the harmful trade in Morrocoys by following one simple rule: Don't Buy Wild!

Finally, if you have any remaining questions, we welcome you to contact the Nurture Nature Campaign on Facebook or Instagram, by email (nurturenaturett@gmail.com), or through our website (www.nurturenaturett.org).

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