

Tortoises, terrapins and turtles (chelonia) under UK primary veterinary care

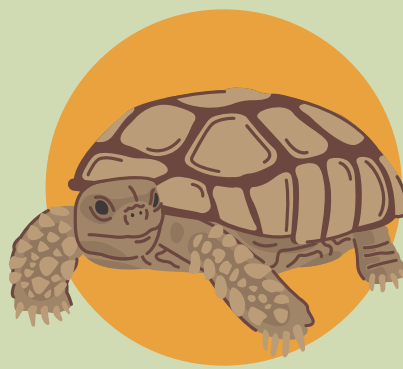
Tortoises, terrapins and turtles (i.e. chelonian species) are common domestic pets, with 1.8% of UK households estimated to own at least one tortoise or terrapin. This VetCompass study reports the commonly recorded disorders and provides demographic and mortality data on the UK chelonia under primary veterinary care during 2019.

Study Population

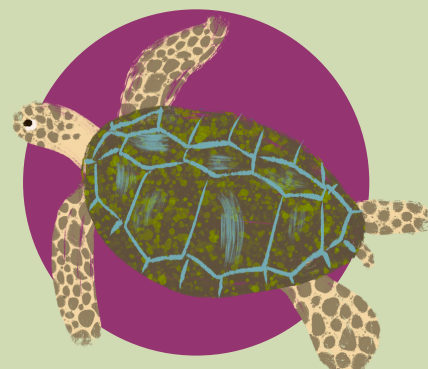
Chelonia represented 0.11% of all animals seen by UK vets in 2019. The analysis included a random sample of 2,040 (46.03%) from 4,432 chelonia under veterinary care in 2019 in VetCompass. Of the chelonia with species recorded, the **most common tortoise** species was **Hermann's tortoise** and the **most common terrapin** group was **Musk turtle**.



Terrapins
74 (3.63%)



Tortoises
1,923 (94.26%)



Turtles
43 (2.11%)

(Note: many of the "turtles" recorded in the current study were likely to have been misclassified tortoises or terrapins)

Disorder prevalence

Dog bite
(2.4%)

Overgrown nails
(11.5%)

Beak abnormalities
(16.7%)

Undiagnosed disorder
(4.0%)

Shell abnormalities
(9.8%)

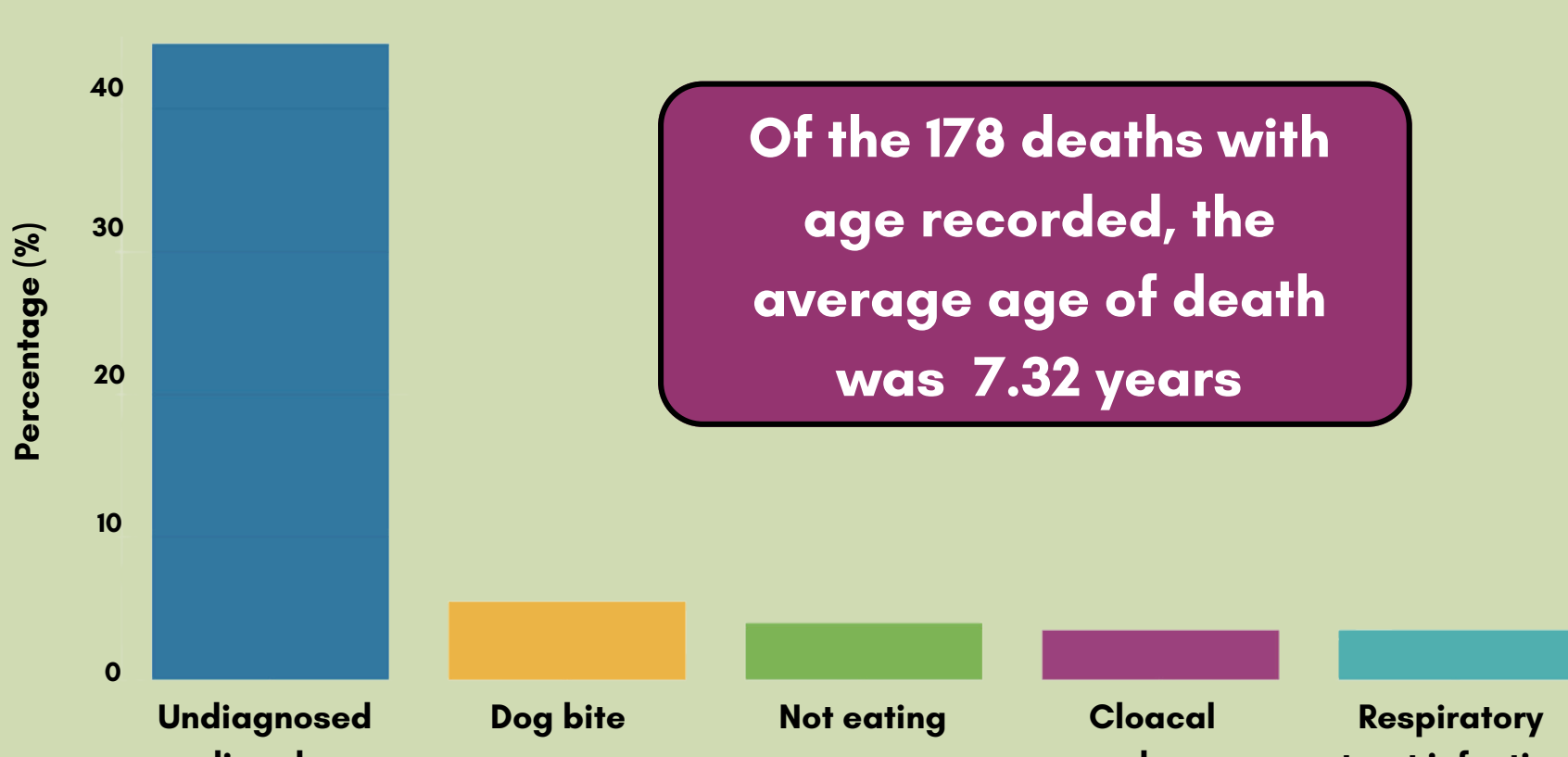
Not eating
(4.7%)

Eye disorder
(3.5%)

The three most common disorders – **beak abnormality**, **overgrown nails** & **shell abnormality** – are all externally visible and may indicate inappropriate husbandry or internal disease.

Chelonians are good at hiding internal disease so annual veterinary health checks are important to ensure diseases are spotted and treated early.

Mortality



Of the 178 deaths with age recorded, the average age of death was 7.32 years

Causes of death in Chelonia

Many common disorders of chelonia may be related to how we feed and house these animals as pets.

Increased accuracy of species recognition by owners and veterinarians could further improve the welfare gains from primary veterinary care of tortoises

This study emphasises the importance of owners closely observing their pets for subtle signs of disease to ensure early presentation for veterinary care that will promote the best possible outcomes.

[CLICK TO READ FULL STUDY](#)

RVC VetCompass <https://www.rvc.ac.uk/vetcompass> carries out welfare research based on anonymised clinical information shared from over 30% of UK veterinary practices. We are very grateful to the owners and veterinary professionals who contribute to VetCompass research.