POST-HIBERNATION ANOREXIA IN MEDITERRANEAN TORTOISES (*Testudo* spp.) IN THE UK

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Abstract: Post-hibernation anorexia (PHA) is unfortunately quite common in the UK. It appears to be paradoxically more common in those owners who have owned tortoises for many years, often inherited from an elderly relation. These owners are used to providing 'minimal maintenance' care where the tortoise is allowed to roam freely in the garden, feeding on whatever it finds and hibernation occurs unsupervised and unobserved. Their animals survive for years in this way until they gradually succumb to a number of concurrent diseases. The introduction of new legislation in the UK governing the sale of Mediterranean tortoise (*Testudo* spp.) has led to a decrease in this kind of 'casual' owner. The 'modern' tortoise owner or breeder has a more sophisticated approach where supplementary heating in outdoor enclosures, heated indoor vivariums, balanced diets and carefully controlled hibernation protocols are more evident. The syndrome of PHA can be divided into two types - uncomplicated and complicated. Uncomplicated PHA is generally characterized as a derangement of certain blood biochemistry and hematological parameters including a low blood glucose. No concurrent clinical illness is present. Complicated PHA is diagnosed when clinical disease processes are also present. Concurrent diseases commonly diagnosed include pneumonia, dystocia, peritonitis, rhinitis and ocular disease. The distinction between the two relies upon a thorough clinical examination and appropriate diagnostic techniques. The most common conditions involved in PHA will be discussed. A correct hibernation protocol is vital in preventing PHA. The methods currently practiced in the UK range from the garden compost heap to a well-insulated hibernaculum where the temperature, humidity and activity of the tortoise throughout the hibernation protocol are monitored. Management of the tortoise with PHA should also include a revision of current practice and appropriate advice to the owner to prevent future disease.