



## DESERT TORTOISE

Phylum: Chordata, Class: Reptilia, Order: Chelonia  
*Gopherus agassizii*

**Status:** *ENDANGERED*

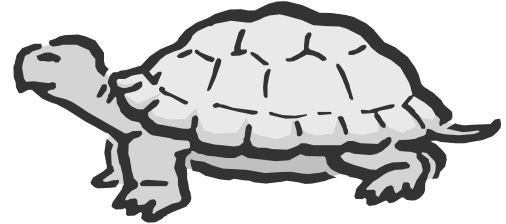
**Threats to survival:** habitat loss, diseases from introduced species.

**Habitat:** desert washes, oases, rocky hillsides, canyon bottoms

**Range:** United States - Nevada, Arizona, California, Utah;  
Mexico - Baja, Sinaloa, Sonora RHZ tortoises:

**Diet in the wild:** herbivorous - grasses, cacti, desert blossoms

**Size:** average length of the top shell (carapace) = 19 inches



### Other facts:

- Desert tortoise populations are in trouble due to habitat loss and destruction. Their habitat is destroyed by motorcyclists who crush their shells and burrows. Cattle and sheep often overgraze the land. Miners build “tailings” ponds in which the tortoises drown.
- Desert tortoise populations have also been threatened by a deadly respiratory illness carried by pet tortoises released into the wild.
- Desert tortoises dig huge burrows where they seek relief from the desert’s extreme heat. Some burrows are up to 32 feet long. If the average human were to accomplish a similar feat, he or she would have to dig a tunnel 115 feet long!
- The mating season extends from the spring into late summer. Nesting occurs from May through July.
- Females dig funnel-shaped nests in sandy soils. Females lay 2-3 clutches (groups) of 5-6 eggs each year.

Hatching usually occurs in September or October, after a 90-120 day incubation period.

