



WELCOME TO

THE CALIFORNIA DESERT,
HOME OF THE DESERT TORTOISE.

You might not see this amazing animal. To beat the heat, it spends most of its time underground. But you need to know a few things about it. The desert tortoise is in trouble, and what you do in the desert can affect this species' survival.



The Desert Tortoise (*Gopherus agassizii*) can be found in the Mojave and Sonoran Deserts of southern California, Nevada, Utah and Arizona.



The Desert Managers Group (DMG) is a partnership of county, state and federal agencies working together to conserve and enhance the California desert for current and future generations.
www.dmg.gov



The Living Desert is a remarkable zoo and botanical garden representing the deserts of North America and Africa. Its mission is desert conservation through preservation, education and appreciation.



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YOU'RE IN DESERT TORTOISE COUNTRY

RESPECT

PROTECT

ENJOY





DESERT TORTOISE

GOPHERUS AGASSIZII

You may notice the half-moon-shaped holes that punctuate the desert landscape. These are the entrances to the burrows desert tortoises dig to cope with the extreme desert temperatures.

Desert tortoises leave their burrows, often located in the shade of bushes on the open sandy flats or in the banks of dry washes, mainly to eat and drink. They build up most of their fat and water reserves in the spring, when the desert is abloom with wildflowers, grasses and other succulent green plants. They store up to a year's supply of water in their canteen-like bladders, absorbing it as needed. In winter they retreat to their deepest burrows.

Well-adapted as the desert tortoise is to its harsh environment, this ancient species is defenseless against the changes caused directly or indirectly by the growing human population. More people in the desert leads to the degradation of tortoise habitat in many ways. As a result of these changes, the number of wild desert tortoises has sharply declined.

Researchers are closely monitoring desert tortoise populations and working to address the threats they face. By following the tips on this brochure you can help.

THREATENED

The desert tortoise is now on the federal list of threatened species and is protected by state and federal law.



CONSERVATION TIPS

• KEEP THE DESERT CLEAN

Don't dump or litter. Desert tortoises can get tangled in trash, and garbage attracts ravens and other predators that feed on tortoises, their eggs and hatchlings. And don't feed ravens!

• LEAVE THEM ALONE

It is against the law to touch, harm, harass or collect a wild desert tortoise. When alarmed, tortoises void their bladders and waste precious stored water—a reaction that can prove fatal for tortoises unable to replenish the supply. Stay at least 10 feet away from any tortoise you spot, and keep dogs leashed at all times.

• STAY ON DESIGNATED ROADS & TRAILS

Don't drive, bike or walk off trails or roads except in designated areas. Cross-country travel in the desert can crush tortoise burrows, burying the occupants underground or stranding tortoises on the surface where they are vulnerable to predators and deadly temperature extremes. Traveling cross-country also disturbs the soil promoting the growth of invasive plants that are less nutritious for tortoises.



The slow-moving desert tortoise is no match for motorized vehicles. Whether on a paved highway or a dirt road, be on the lookout wherever you drive in the desert.

• CHECK UNDER PARKED VEHICLES

Desert tortoises may seek shade beneath parked cars, trucks and recreational vehicles. If you park in the desert, look under your vehicle before you drive.

• WATCH FOR TORTOISES ON ROADS & TRAILS

Desert tortoises readily cross roads and trails, but the slow-moving species is no match for bikes, cars, trucks and off-highway vehicles. Be alert and proceed with caution!

• DON'T RELEASE PET TORTOISES IN THE DESERT

A pet tortoise released in the wild probably won't survive and may infect resident tortoises with disease. Wild desert tortoises are susceptible to upper respiratory infections and other diseases linked to captive tortoises. If you have a pet tortoise and can no longer care for it, call the nearest chapter of the California Turtle and Tortoise Club found at www.tortoise.org.