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Media Contact: Erin Scott  
Sr. Marketing & Public Relations Manager  
760-346-5694 x. 2610  
[escott@livingdesert.org](mailto:escott@livingdesert.org)

**THE LIVING DESERT CELEBRATES DESERT TORTOISE WEEK WITH  
ACTIVITIES AND EVENTS**

*Zoo Launches Gold Star Restaurant Program to Support Desert Tortoise  
Conservation in the Hi-Desert.*

**PALM DESERT/INDIAN WELLS, CA** – (October 6, 2020) – The Living Desert Zoo and Gardens proudly celebrates Desert Tortoise Week, October 5-11, 2020, in partnership with the United States Fish and Wildlife Service. The Zoo is committed to raising awareness and educating the community on simple actions everyone can take to help conserve this vital and iconic desert species.

The Zoo is hosting a variety of activities to commemorate the week, including a native plant sale at the Appel Gift Shop, a themed on-grounds scavenger hunt, and virtual tortoise talks. In addition, the Zoo is excited to cohost a screening at the new Coachella Valley Drive-In held at the Palm Springs Air Museum on Wednesday, October 7. The event will feature the conservation documentary, *Tortoise in Peril*, followed by the cult-classic *The Birds*, along with a visit from some desert tortoise ambassadors. Tickets are available at [www.coachellavalleydrivein.com](http://www.coachellavalleydrivein.com).

The Living Desert is also proud to launch its Gold Star Restaurant program this week, which recognizes the efforts of 35 local businesses in the Yucca Valley and Twentynine Palms area that demonstrate the sustainable practice of consistently closing their dumpsters to protect the local community and wildlife. Over the last 50 years, raven populations have increased 1,700% around human developments because people are indiscriminately providing food, water, and nesting resources. These inflated raven populations decimate native wildlife including the threatened and iconic desert tortoise. Open dumpsters and trashcans prove an especially reliable food source for ravens, making it difficult for tortoises to thrive.

"The Gold Star Award was established as a conservation incentive to reduce the unnaturally large numbers of ravens in Southern California," said Dr. James Danoff-Burg, Director of Conservation at The Living Desert. "We are excited to honor 35 local businesses and their commitment to ensuring that their trash is covered and keeping our desert home clean, healthy, and thriving."

In late 2019 the Living Desert, in partnership with Southern California Edison, engaged 60 restaurants in Twentynine Palms and Yucca Valley in a scientific study, to assess if an awareness and action campaign to deter raven overpopulation would result in more frequently closed dumpsters. Results indicate an average 13% increase in dumpster closure among restaurants who received communications, representing an astounding 47 more days per year that each restaurant closed its dumpsters.

"We're honored to receive The Living Desert's Gold Star Award. Frontier Cafe is committed to reducing our impact on the environment," noted the Owners of Frontier Café in Yucca Valley. "We know that even simple protocols, like keeping trash inaccessible to ravens, can have a large impact on local ecosystems."

The Mojave desert tortoise, *Gopherus agassizii*, is currently listed as Vulnerable by the International Union of the Conservation of Nature (IUCN). Desert tortoise populations are threatened by raven predation, urbanization, illegal collection for the pet trade, off-highway

vehicles, and upper-respiratory tract infections. The Living Desert's Healthy Desert Education Project, features the Time to Talk Trash campaign, which educates people about how the dramatic rise in raven populations has led to a decrease in tortoise hatchling survival rates.

To learn more about Desert Tortoise Week events and the Gold Star Restaurant program, visit [LivingDesert.org](http://LivingDesert.org).

The Living Desert is open daily from 8 a.m.- 5 p.m. With more than 80 acres of outdoor space, numerous precautions, and limited capacity, there is plenty of space to socially distance. Advance ticket reservations and facial coverings are required.

**About the Living Desert:**

The Living Desert Zoo and Gardens is a nonprofit, accredited member of the Association of Zoos and Aquariums, ensuring the highest standards of all aspects of animal care, education, conservation, public service, and operations. The Zoo is active in conservation research, habitat protection, breeding programs and education initiatives around the world, as well as in its own community. The Zoo has been a top destination in the Palm Springs area for 50 years. The Living Desert is located at 47900 Portola Ave, Palm Desert, CA 92260. For more information: (760) 346-5694 or visit [livingdesert.org](http://livingdesert.org).

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