



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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PHOTOS ATTACHED

**THE LIVING DESERT'S MOJAVE MAXINE EMERGES
FROM HIBERNATION, SIGNALING SPRING IS HERE**

Student Contest Winners Will Receive Prizes Including a Virtual Visit with a Desert Tortoise

PALM DESERT/INDIAN WELLS, CA – (February 9, 2021) – The Living Desert's Mojave Maxine emerged from brumation (reptilian hibernation) yesterday, February 8 at 3:11 p.m. The 44-year-old desert tortoise is the ultimate predictor that spring is near — and surprised many with post Groundhog Day emergence.

(NOTE: Video of Mojave Maxine can be accessed [here](#).)

"Maxine has emerged increasingly early since 2015, reflecting a changing climate where our warm season lasts longer, and survival is more challenging for desert wildlife. In 2021, she had a record-breaking early emergence on January 18," said Dr. James Danoff-Burg, Director of Conservation. "Maxine is an indicator for wild tortoise behaviors as well, so we are glad to see her emerge at a more reasonable time this year."

Each winter, Mojave Maxine retires to her underground burrow and remains there in a state of brumation, a hibernation-like state, for several months. She emerges in early spring as the warm days begin to arrive in the desert, ready for fresh flowers, a favorite meal for the desert tortoise.

Every year students from Imperial, Inyo, San Diego, Orange, San Bernardino, Riverside, Los Angeles, Ventura, and Kern counties are invited to participate in a contest to guess the date and time that Mojave Maxine will emerge. The first contest entry received from each county that is closest to the exact day and time wins a virtual classroom visit from a desert tortoise and biologist, Mojave Maxine t-shirts for their entire class, and a tortoise book for their teacher's library.

"The contest is an engaging way to help the next generation of conservation leaders learn about the behaviors of the desert tortoise, along with what they can do to help protect them," said Alex Ocañas, Conservation Social Scientist. "We will be reaching out to the winners soon."

For more information, visit LivingDesert.org or call (760) 346-5694.

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 over 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.