



Desert Tortoise

(*Xerobates agassizii*)

Order: Testudines Family: Testudinidae

SIZE: 9-14 ½ inches in length. Males slightly larger than females.

DESCRIPTION: Domed top shell (carapace). Plastron (bottom shell) in males is concave, in females flat. Hind legs are stumpy and elephant like. Front legs are heavily scaled with claws for digging. Small head. No teeth, but jaws have sharp edges for biting off food.

SENSES: Sense of smell is keen. Good eyesight.

LOCOMOTION: It extends its legs and lifts shell up off the ground when walking. Able to cover great distances in one day, up to 7 miles.

HABITS: Found in arid, sandy regions with desert brush, and in canyon bottoms and rocky hillsides.

Ectothermic. During the heat of the day, they retreat to a shallow burrow. During the winter months, they den together and remain inactive until March. When two males happen upon each other, they may bob their heads rapidly, rush towards each other and strike their gular scutes (a projection from the front of the plastron) together, in an attempt to overturn the other. For defense, they retract head, legs and tail into shell.

DIET: Herbivorous. Feed on grasses, prickly pear cactus and other desert vegetation.

RANGE: Southeastern California, southern Nevada and western Arizona down into Mexico.

FAMILY LIFE: Mating occurs primarily in the spring. One month later, the female lays 2-14 hard, spherical eggs in a funnel shaped nest, or buries them in sand. The young emerge 3-4 months later and are precocial.

ENEMIES: Coyotes, humans and cars.

DID YOU KNOW THAT...?

- The desert tortoise does not reach maturity until 15-20 years of age.
- They have been known to dig horizontal tunnels up to 30 ft. in length.
- They are a threatened species and are protected by Arizona State Law.
- They can live to be 50-80 years old.
- The desert tortoise stays below ground for much of the day to help retain fluids.



Range

Western and Southwestern
Arizona in the warmer areas.