

California Desert Tortoise

CLASS- Reptilia

ORDER-Chelonia

FAMILY- Testudinidae

GENUS SPECIES- *Gopherus*

GEOGRAPHIC RANGE: Found in the Mojave and Sonoran Desert of Southern California, Nevada, and Utah.

HABITAT: Lives in semi-arid grassland, desert washes, and sandy canyon bottoms below 3,500 ft.

NICHE: The desert tortoise is most commonly known for its high, patterned shell and the fact that it lives in burrows underground.

DIET: their diets varies throughout the desert depending on the rain season. Desert Tortoise is an herbivore that means it eats plants like: herbs, grasses, wildflowers and a variety of desert plants. The desert tortoise drinks water collected in pools and ponds. Its water intake is also through the moisture found in grass and wildflowers.

PHYSICAL CHARACTERISTICS & ADAPTATIONS:

Description: The desert tortoise has a high domed shell, or carapace, that is greenish to dark brown in color. Its front limbs have heavy, claw-like scales and their flat shapes are well-designed for digging.

Height- 4-6 inches

Length- 9-25 inches (shell Length)

Weight- 8-15 lbs.

Adaptations:

Desert tortoise are able to burrow to escape heat. They can store water in their bladder, and are able to tolerate high levels of urea in their blood to keep from losing moisture through excess urinating. They can go for long periods of time without food or water.

Predators:

Badgers, roadrunners, coyotes and ravens are the prominent predators of the desert tortoise.

DENTITION: Desert tortoises do not have teeth. Instead, they have bony plates in the roof of their mouths that help them rip off pieces of plants. They use their tongues to push food down their throats.

SOCIAL BEHAVIOR: The desert tortoise is most active during the day (diurnal) or the morning and evening (crepuscular), depending on the temperature. This tortoise spends most of its life underground. It burrows under the sand to protect itself from extreme

desert temperatures, which range from 140°F (60°C) down to well below freezing. Adults can survive for about a year without water. They produce a variety of sounds, including hisses and grunts. When in danger, tortoises can withdraw their head, legs, and tail into the shell. Fighting may occur any time males encounter one another, and usually ends in the subordinate male running away from the other.

REPRODUCTIVE INFORMATION:

Reproduction Mating Season: Late summer to early fall.

Gestation: 10-12 months.

Clutch size: 4-6 eggs.

Females do not breed until they are 15 to 20 years old. Survival of juveniles is low: only 2-3 per 100 hatched may live to become adults.

LIFE SPAN: 50-80 years and some may live longer.

MISCELLANEOUS: No other tortoise in North America shares the extreme conditions of habitats occupied by the desert tortoise.

April 2, 1990 the Desert Tortoise was listed by U.S. Fish & Wildlife service as a threatened species.

SERC ANIMALS: Jeremiah- California Desert Tortoise.

Horsfield Tortoise

CLASS Reptilia ORDER Testudines FAMILY Testudinidae
GENUS SPECIES *Testudo Horsfieldii*

GEOGRAPHIC RANGE: The Horsfield tortoise is found in Afghanistan, Northern Pakistan, Northern and Eastern Iran, North Western China and the Soviet territory of Kazakhstan.

HABITAT: The Horsfield tortoise lives in arid clay rocky deserts with sparse grasses and bushes and near a spring. The tortoise can be found as high as 5,000 to 7,000 feet.

NICHE: When the Horsfield tortoise eats plants the seeds remain in the feces and from the seeds new plants grow. The tortoise is a food option for many predators in the habitat and their eggs are food for birds and other animals.

DIET: The Horsfield tortoise is an herbivore eating plants that are high in fiber, low in protein and rich in calcium. Fruit, which are high in sugar, can cause digestive problems for the tortoise. High protein diets can lead to death.

PHYSICAL CHARACTERISTICS & ADAPTATIONS:

Description: The Horsfield tortoise has a round upper shell, also known as a carapace, and is almost as wide as it is long. The carapace has varying brown coloration while the plastron, lower shell, is black with yellow seams. Its head and limbs are a yellowish-brown color; their jaws are noticeably darker while the neck is lighter in coloration. The front legs of the Horsfield have heavily armored scales and have scale like spurs on each heel. There are blunt tubercles on each thigh and the tail ends in a horny claw. This species of tortoise only has four toes.

Weight: The Horsfield tortoise can weight up to 10 kilograms or up to 22 pounds.

Habits and Adaptations: The Horsfield tortoise hibernates from October to March in deep burrows. The ideal body temperature is between thirty-nine degrees and forty-one degrees. The tortoise likes to burrow deep into the ground. The Horsfield tortoise does not mix well with other species of tortoise and the males can be aggressive. They are most active during the early morning and early evening and retreats to its burrow during the heat of the day.

DENTITION: The Horsfield tortoise does not have any teeth but they do have horny ridges on their upper and lower jaws. They have ridged beaks and jaws that they use to bite and chew their food and they use their tongue to swallow their food.

SOCIAL BEHAVIOR: The male Horsfield tortoise can be aggressive and they do not mix well with other species of tortoise.

REPRODUCTIVE INFORMATION: The Horsfield tortoise mates from mid-March to

mid-June. They have an unusual ritual: the male circles the female several times then stops face the female head on. The male extends its neck and jerks its head up and down rapidly while occasionally ramming and biting the female. The Horsfield tortoise will lay between two and six eggs, called a clutch, and they can lay two to three clutches in a season. Baby tortoises emerge 80 to 110 days after laying. The Horsfield tortoise reaches sexual maturity at age ten and is not considered fully grown until 20 - 30 years.

LIFE SPAN: 50 years or more

MISCELLANEOUS: The Horsfield tortoise is also known as: Russian tortoise, Steppe tortoise, Afghanistan tortoise, Four-toed tortoise and Russian box turtle.

SERC ANIMALS: Mikhal - Horsfield (Russian) Tortoise



Ornate Box Turtle

CLASS Reptilia ORDER Testudines FAMILY Emydidae *GENUS SPECIES Terrapene ornata*

GEOGRAPHIC RANGE: The Ornate Box Turtle may be found from South Dakota to southern Arizona and the Rio Grande valley. The Mississippi River generally marks the eastern boundary of its range.

HABITAT: It reaches its greatest abundance on the western open prairie, but can be found in grassy vegetation of pastures, open woodlands, and open fields.

NICHE:

The Ornate Box turtle has a very ornate pattern on its shell. Each shell segment (scute) has a radiating pattern of yellow lines on a dark brown background. This may be seen on both the upper shell (carapace) and the lower shell (plastron).

DIET:

Beetles, caterpillars, grasshoppers, cicadas, earthworms, berries, other fruits, and dead vertebrates

PHYSICAL CHARACTERISTICS & ADAPTATIONS:

Description:

The terrestrial ornate box turtle is characterized by a short tail, a rigid upper shell, a distinct movable hinge on the lower shell, four claws on each hind foot, and distinct radiating yellow or orange-yellow lines on the dark lower shell. The head and limbs are dark brown, gray, or greenish, and are covered with yellow or orange-yellow spots. The dark tail may have a yellow stripe on its upper surface. Adult males have red eyes, while females' eyes are yellowish brown. Females grow slightly larger than males.

Weight:

0.7 pounds

Length:

4-5 inches

Habits and Adaptations:

This turtle is active from April to October at air temperatures ranging from 60 to 95 degrees Fahrenheit. With the approach of winter, it will dig beneath the ground or enter the dens or burrows of other animals. In open grasslands it may dig to a depth of 18 inches, but in woodlands the burrows are as shallow as six inches. Emergence from the burrow during spring is dependent on a period of warm, moist weather. Ornate box turtles are diurnal, spending the daytime basking, feeding, and resting.

They have powerful front legs with strong claws used for digging and tearing apart manure piles in search of beetles and grubs. Studies have shown the numbers of ornate box turtles are reduced when cattle are removed from their home range.

DENTITION:

The Ornate Box turtle has no teeth. Instead it cuts its food with the sharp edges of its jaws.

SOCIAL BEHAVIOR:

The Ornate Box Turtle is active from April through October. It may spend its entire life within an area of only a few acres. It begins its day by basking in the sun. After getting warmed up, it goes looking for food.

REPRODUCTIVE INFORMATION:

Mating occurs in the spring and autumn, but may also take place throughout the summer. Courtship begins with the male mounting the female, and then copulation occurs. Nesting and egg deposition occur at least once a year in all females, and probably a third of the females in a population lay a second clutch in the same season. Nesting is most common in June, but may occur from May into autumn. Each female can lay two to eight elongated, white eggs, which will hatch in a little over two months. Young become sexually mature at seven to eight years of age.

LIFE SPAN:

May live 30+ years.

MISCELLANEOUS: Kansas State Reptile as of 1986

SERC ANIMALS:

Bacall and Bogart

RED-EARED POND SLIDER

CLASS-Reptilia ORDER-Testudines FAMILY-
Emydidae *GENUS SPECIES Tracgemys/scripta* Subspecies-T.
Scripta elegans

GEOGRAPHIC RANGE: Native-Mississippi Valley from Illinois to the Gulf of Mexico.

Non-native in U.S.-east, north, and south of it's native range. Non-native countries: Asia (Japan, S. Korea), Europe (Germany, France), and South Africa

HABITAT: Freshwater systems such as lakes, streams, swamps, ponds, and rivers. Like quiet waters with soft bottoms with numerous basking sites and lots of aquatic vegetation. Faithful to home regions.

NICHE: In its home range, it acts as both food item and predator. Outside its home range, it fills the same types of niches, and is becoming an important food source for opportunistic predators in urban and suburban areas. The pond slider will "burrow" and become inactive as the temperature below 10 degrees Celsius.

There is a positive and a negative economic impact of the pond slider on humans. The negative side is based on the potential disease this turtle may carry (Salmonella bacteria). The positive side is that the pond slider has filled an important niche in their wetland habitats, and are appealing to most people. Unfortunately, they have been taken advantage of by humans for both the pet trade and for food purposes.

DIET: Omnivores, with a variety of animal and plant materials. Young sliders are more carnivorous; adults eat more plant matter. Plants- arrowhead, water lilies, hyacinths, duckweed. Fish- crayfish, carrion, tadpoles, snails, crickets.

PHYSICAL CHARACTERISTICS & ADAPTATIONS:

Description: Medium in size with a broad reddish stripe behind its eyes. Young ones have a green carapace and skin with yellow green to dark green markings with bars on the top of it's shell, legs, and face. Color in adults

turns to a faded olive green color. Some older ones, especially males, turn almost black. Chin is rounded and there is a V-shaped notch at the front of its jaw. Shell is smooth and oval with the bottom being yellow with dark markings. They have webbed feet and males have longer claws and are usually smaller in size than females. Male has a longer, thicker tail. Body form is a classic basking style.

Length is 5"-8" up to 12 " long.

Weight: Average is 8.45 ounces

Habits and Adaptations: Aquatic turtle, strong swimmer, basker, brumation occurs.

DENTITION: Hatchling has an egg tooth which its uses to crack open its egg. It falls out about an hour after hatching and never grows back.

SOCIAL BEHAVIOR: Pond sliders are mostly aquatic but will leave water to bask on logs, rocks, and stumps near water. Sometimes they stack themselves on top, up to 3 feet high. There is sharing of basking spots. They have poor hearing but are sensitive to vibrations and may nap while basking, but are still very alert during this time. They are fast and decent swimmers, may bite, and hunt for prey. They have fixed tongues (no saliva) so they must eat food in water. Sliders will sleep underwater at night.

REPRODUCTIVE INFORMATION: Male pond sliders have a unique mating ritual, which occurs between the months of March and July. They approach the female from the front, stretch out their legs and vibrate their claws on the head and neck of the female, at times even biting the female on the neck. The female will swim forward and if receptive will stop and sink to the bottom. Females may have 1-3 clutches a season and will travel to find best site for nesting.

LIFE SPAN: May live up to 30 years and even up to 70 years in a natural environment.

MISCELLANEOUS: Subspecies-T. Scripta elegans. The name "slider" came from its ability to slide into the water at a quick speed. The slider is the most common water turtle kept as a pet. It is known as the "dime store" turtle. In the past, it transmitted the disease salmonellosis, causing a number

of human deaths and this lead to laws banning the sale of turtles smaller than 4”.

Some states have laws regarding possession of the slider because they can be an invasive species.

SERC ANIMALS: Not present at the SERC when this was written (10/11)

Texas Tortoise

CLASS Reptilia ORDER Testudines FAMILY Testudinidae *GENUS SPECIES Gopherus berlandieri*

GEOGRAPHIC RANGE:

The Texas tortoise range begins in southern Texas and extends southward into the Mexican states of Coahuila, Nuevo León, and Tamaulipas.

HABITAT:

Its preferred habitat is dry scrub and grasslands.

NICHE:

The Texas tortoise does not dig its own burrows; it instead will borrow those dug by other animals or they will scrape out a depression in the ground called a pallet that is at the base of a cactus or scrub brush.

DIET:

Succulent plants, a preferred food of the Texas tortoise, are common in its range. They especially like the fruit of cacti such as the prickly pear.

PHYSICAL CHARACTERISTICS & ADAPTATIONS:

Description:

The Texas tortoise has yellowish-orange, "horned" plates on its carapace (top shell) and cylindrical and columnar hind legs, like those of an elephant. About one and a half inches long (and wide) at hatching, this turtle will normally grow to have a shell length of about eight and a half inches.

Weight:

8 - 15 pounds

Length:

8½ inches

Habits and Adaptations:

The Texas tortoise, like all species of gopher tortoise, is an adept burrower. It usually has several different burrows in its territory that it can retreat into during the heat of the day.

DENTITION:

Texas tortoises do not have teeth, instead they have a beak that they use to cut foliage, and use their tongue to pull it into their mouth.

SOCIAL BEHAVIOR:

Weather permitting, this species can be found active almost every month out of the year.

REPRODUCTIVE INFORMATION:

Texas tortoises become sexually mature at 5 years of age. Females nest from April to September. They lay up to 7 eggs per clutch. Hatchlings are about 1.5 inches long.

LIFE SPAN:

unknown, maybe as great as 60 years

MISCELLANEOUS:

The Texas tortoise is listed as a threatened species in the state of Texas, and thus protected by state law.

Also known as Berlandier's Tortoise in honor of the Belgian naturalist Jean Louis Berlandier, who worked for the Mexican government on one of the first biological surveys of Texas.

Related fossil forms in this genus have been found in the Pliocene in Central Texas. The Pliocene is considered as dating back to 10 million years B.C.

SERC ANIMALS:

Governor