

# DESERT TORTOISE

(*Gopherus agassizii*)



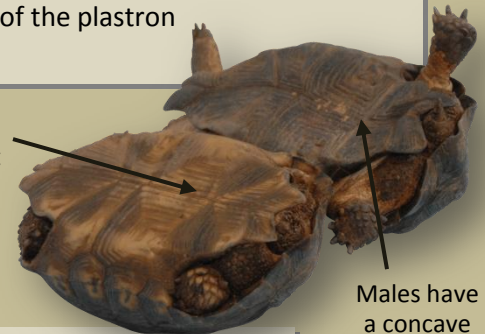
NATIVE/PROTECTED



**Description:** Large tortoise (up to 15 inches long) with a brown, high-domed carapace. The front feet are very muscular and are used for digging while the rear legs are stout and elephant-like. The front of the plastron under the neck has two horn-like projections.

**Habitat:** Terrestrial; in Arizona they inhabit rocky slopes and bajadas, but can also be found in valleys and alluvial fans in desert scrub habitat.

Females have a flat plastron



Males have a concave plastron

**Behavior:** Herbivorous; eats leaves, stems, and flowers of many desert plants. Spends up to 95 percent of its life in burrows to regulate its body temperature; hibernates in winter. Emerges most often from July to October to feed, bask, and breed.

**Conservation:** Arizona law has prohibited removal of desert tortoises from the wild since 1988. Lawfully obtained, captive desert tortoises may be adopted, but desert tortoise adoption in Arizona is subject to specific rules; see [www.azgfd.gov/tortoise](http://www.azgfd.gov/tortoise) for more information.

\*The Mojave population is a federally listed Threatened species. Transportation of any desert tortoise across state lines is unlawful.

**If you find one:** Let it be unless it is in harm's way crossing a road, in which case you may gently lift it high enough so its feet are just above the ground and move it across the road in the direction it was heading. If the tortoise was found in an urban area, away from any natural areas, it is likely an escaped captive tortoise. Please contact the nearest [Tortoise Adoption Program facility](#) to make arrangements to place it into the adoption program. If you cannot immediately bring it to an adoption facility, keep it in a clean, dry box in a cool, quiet area.