

How can I help to protect wild desert tortoises?

Be a responsible custodian –

- PLEASE DO NOT ALLOW CAPTIVE TORTOISES TO BREED! Keep males and females separated or do not keep pairs.
- PLEASE DO NOT SELL THEM OR TURN THEM LOOSE – it is not legal to do so! If you no longer wish to be a desert tortoise custodian, contact your nearest wildlife agency¹ or tortoise club² where your tortoise can be legally adopted into a new good home.
- PLEASE DO NOT GIVE THEM AWAY – depending upon where you live, it may not be legal to do so! If you have baby tortoises, contact the nearest state wildlife agency¹ or tortoise club² so they can be *legally* adopted into good homes as soon as they are mature enough.

Spread the word about the care of captive/pet desert tortoises –

- By knowing these facts about captive/pet desert tortoises and the danger that they can be to wild desert tortoises, we encourage you to spread your knowledge to your neighbors, your children’s schools, and others who might keep desert tortoises as pets or know people who do.
- Irresponsible care of captive tortoises is a problem for wild desert tortoises, and it is a problem that we cannot solve without you.
- Only responsible custodians can solve this problem and remove this threat from the wild desert tortoise and assist in tortoise recovery.

Be a responsible citizen –

- Please leave wild desert tortoises in the wild.
- Please don’t handle a wild desert tortoise unless you are moving it to safety at the side of a road.
- Please alert a state wildlife office¹ or tortoise club² if you see a desert tortoise that could be an escaped pet.

¹Arizona

Arizona Game and Fish Department
(602) 942-3000

California

California Department of Fish & Wildlife
(661) 285-5867

Nevada

Nevada Department of Wildlife
(702) 486-5127

Utah

Utah Division of Wildlife Resources
(435) 879-8694
(801) 538-4830

²For more information about desert tortoise adoption and care or to contact a state wildlife office or turtle and tortoise club in your area, go to:

www.mojavedata.gov/deserttortoise_gov



MY PET DESERT TORTOISE CAN BE A THREAT TO WILD TORTOISES?



Captive “pet” desert tortoises can be a serious threat to wild tortoises.

Did you know that captive tortoises can be a serious threat to wild populations of desert tortoises? Many people believe that breeding desert tortoises will increase populations and thereby help the species to recover. However, it is illegal for captive desert tortoises to be turned loose into the wild because they often carry contagious diseases that can spread to wild populations and be fatal. In fact, one of the common diseases spread by captive tortoises is an upper respiratory tract disease that contributed to the listing of the Mojave desert tortoise under the Endangered Species Act. So, because captive tortoises must remain captive, back-yard breeding only increases the already large population of captive tortoises that need to be adopted, and is highly discouraged by state and Federal wildlife agencies.

What is a captive “pet” desert tortoise?

There are many thousands of captive desert tortoises in their native states of Arizona, California, Nevada, and Utah, as well as a few in other parts of the United States where they are not native. Over 1,000 captive desert tortoises are put up for adoption every year. Tortoises become “captive” by either being (1) illegally picked up by people and kept as pets or (2) bred into captivity by people who keep male and female pets together. “Pet” desert tortoises are captive desert tortoises that have been legally adopted through a state wildlife agency¹ or one of the pet turtle and tortoise clubs² that are authorized in some states for the legal adoption of desert tortoises. People who adopt a desert tortoise serve as “custodians” and do not own the tortoise because desert tortoises are wildlife that belong to the people of their native states and are managed by state and Federal wildlife agencies in those states.



What is being done to protect wild desert tortoises from the harm of captive desert tortoises?

We are enlisting the help of desert tortoise custodians by asking them to (1) keep only one sex of tortoise, or keep sexes separated to prevent breeding and overpopulation, and (2) keep pet desert tortoises safely in captivity to stop the spread of diseases that are fatal to wild tortoises.

Additionally, promoting responsible adoption programs for the legal custodianship of captive desert tortoises is a priority for state wildlife agencies, zoos, and tortoise clubs. Pet tortoises that have NOT been adopted through a state wildlife agency program are not legal. To become a legal custodian, contact your local state wildlife agency¹ or pet turtle and tortoise club² for desert tortoise adoption information. Adoption information is also available at:

www.mojavedata.gov/deserttortoise_gov

