

Common Name: Egyptian Tortoise

Scientific Name: *Testudo Kleinmann*



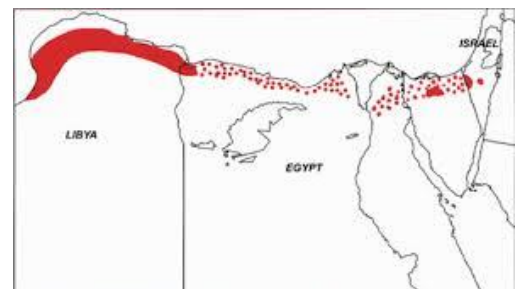
IUCN Red list Status: Critically Endangered
AZA Conservation Program: SSP

Class: Reptilia
Order: Testudinae
Family: Testudinidae
Genus: Testudo

Habitat: Arid & semi-arid deserts and wadis (dry riverbeds) as well as salt marshes. Most of their habitats have been destroyed or degraded.

Threats in the Wild: Egyptian Tortoises are threatened by agricultural development, overgrazing, industrial pressures, and the national and international pet trade. Populations have been reduced by 85% in one generation (about 20 years), and the species could become extinct in one more generation. Only 7500 individuals are estimated to exist in the wild, and the species is considered effectively extinct in Egypt, its namesake country. The Egyptian Tortoise is protected in Egypt, but not in Libya. Although listed under Appendix I of CITES which prohibits international trade in the species, they can still be found illegally for sale. The establishment of protected areas in Libya would greatly enhance the species' chance of survival.

Physical Characteristics: The Egyptian tortoise is the smallest tortoise inhabiting the northern hemisphere. It is the second smallest species of tortoise (the smallest is the speckled padloper of South Africa). It is 3.5 to 5 inches long with a high-domed, golden-colored shell. The color of the carapace can range from ivory and pale, dull yellow through an almost golden, bright straw-color to dark brown. The pale, reflective colors allow the tortoise to forage longer during the intense heat of the day, while also providing good camouflage in the species' sandy, rocky habitat. Dark edging normally exists to the front and sides of each scute, but fades with age, and the head and limbs are a very pale yellow-ivory to yellowish-brown color. The plastron is pale yellow with a characteristic dark triangular notch on the two abdominal scutes, although these are occasionally absent. Males are smaller and more elongated than females, and have longer tails.



Solid red shows current range; dotted area, historic

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Reproduction: In early spring the female typically lays 1 egg (but may lay up to five) in a shallow depression in the sand, under a bush, or in a burrow. The eggs hatch in summer or early autumn. Baby tortoises, the size of a coin at birth, are thought to remain largely inactive and feed little, taking shelter from the heat of the sun until the weather cools in autumn. Their relatively slow reproductive rate greatly increases the chance of this tortoise disappearing within our lifetimes. During mating, the male emits a loud, distinctive vocalization which has been described as similar to a mourning dove's call.

Longevity: Can live 50 + years.

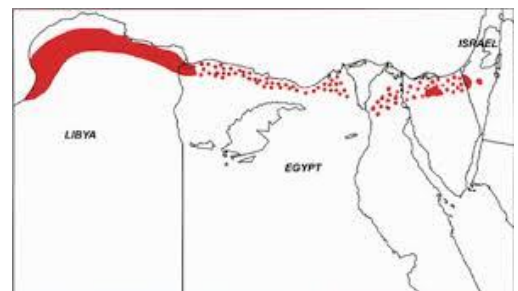
Diet: In the wild: plants, grasses, weeds, roots. At the zoo: mixed vegetables, greens.

Miscellaneous: Ancient Egyptians believed the ground shell cured cataracts when rubbed into the eyes, and also used the shells for jewelry and bowls.

Docent Animal Specifics: Both our Egyptian Tortoises, Ra (named for an Egyptian sun god) and Xerxes (named for a king of Persia), are male and were born in 2007 and were acquired from the Woodland Park Zoo in Seattle.



Fact Sheet – Reptilia – Egyptian Tortoise
Last Updated: April 2020



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