

Name: _____

Desert Tortoise

By Guy Belleranti

A turtle that lives on land is called a tortoise. One interesting tortoise is the desert tortoise. This reptile lives in the Sonoran and Mojave deserts of the southwestern United States and Mexico.



Like all tortoises a desert tortoise has a shell to hide in. However, this animal's best hiding place is the burrow or den it digs with the claws on its muscular front legs. The desert tortoise spends up to 95% of its time in this burrow. Several tortoises often live in the same burrow. Sometimes other animals also move in.

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Because deserts are so dry, desert tortoises get most of their water from their food. But they also dig basins that catch rainwater. They remember where these basins are and during summer rains they return to the basins to drink. In addition, desert tortoises can store some water in their bodies and live off it for many months.

Female desert tortoises lay their first eggs when they are 15 to 20 years old. Egg laying usually occurs in the months of May, June, or early July. A mother tortoise will usually lay between 3 and 8 eggs at a time. She digs a nest near the entrance to her burrow for her



eggs and buries them in the sand. After laying the eggs, she leaves them alone. The eggs are kept warm by the soil. Higher soil temperatures produce females and lower temperatures produce males. The eggs hatch in 3 to 4 months.

Desert tortoises can live many years. Some reach 100 or more, though 50 to 80 years is more likely. However, only a few out of every hundred hatchlings ever make it to adulthood. Predators eat

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About the Author

Guy Belleranti works as a docent at Reid Park Zoo in Tucson, Arizona. The information in this article comes from his experiences working with wild animals and teaching others.

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1. Desert tortoises spend most of their time...
- a. in the desert sun
 - b. in ponds and creeks
 - c. in underground burrows
 - d. eating desert plants

2. In which two deserts would you find wild desert tortoises?

_____ and _____

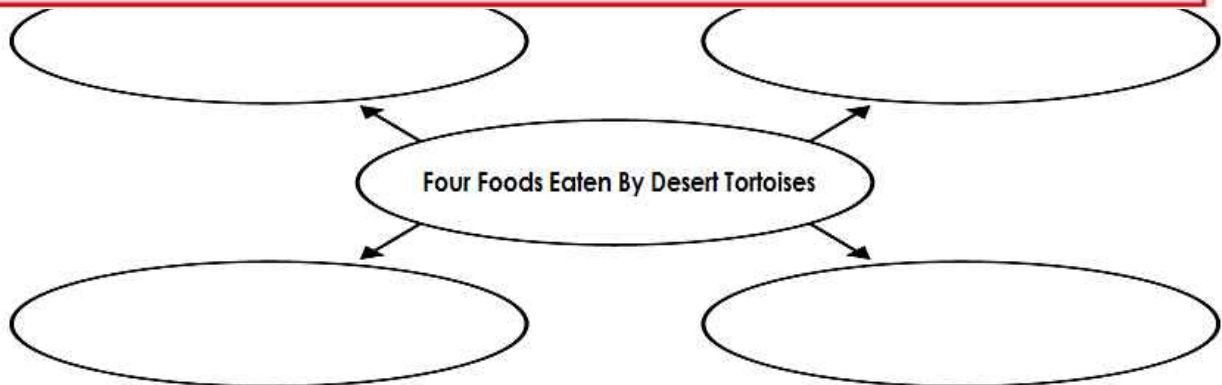
3.



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4.



5. Female turtles usually lay their eggs...
- a. when they reach about 5 years old
 - b. when they are about 50 years old
 - c. far away from their burrow
 - d. in the late-spring or early-summer months

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The scrambled words below are vocabulary words from the article. Unscramble each word and write it on the line. Please be sure each word is spelled correctly.

1. _____ r e d t e s
hint: dry area that is often hot

2. _____ w r o r b u
hint: underground animal home

3. _____ a t e r u r p t e e m s
hint: measurements of warmth



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6. _____ a d s r o
hint: streets

7. _____ s i b a n s
hint: bowls for holding water

ANSWER KEY

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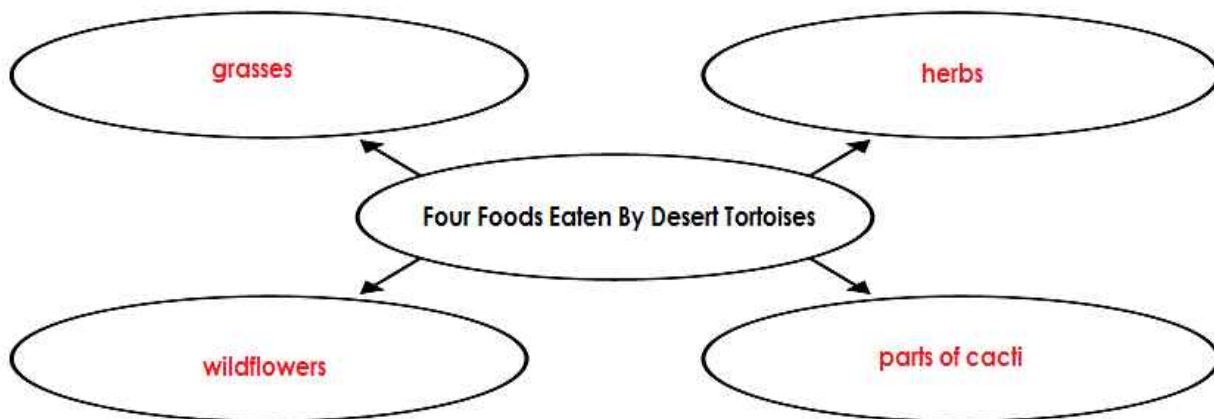
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3.  **PREVIEW**

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4. Complete the graphic organizer.



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ANSWER KEY

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The scrambled words below are vocabulary words from the article. Unscramble each word and write it on the line. Please be sure each word is spelled correctly.

1. **desert**

r e d t e s

hint: dry area that is often hot

2. **burrow**

w r o r b u

hint: underground animal home

3.



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4.

5. **mining**

m g n n i i

hint: removing valuable rocks from the earth

6. **roads**

a d s r o

hint: streets

7. **basins**

s i b a n s

hint: bowls for holding water