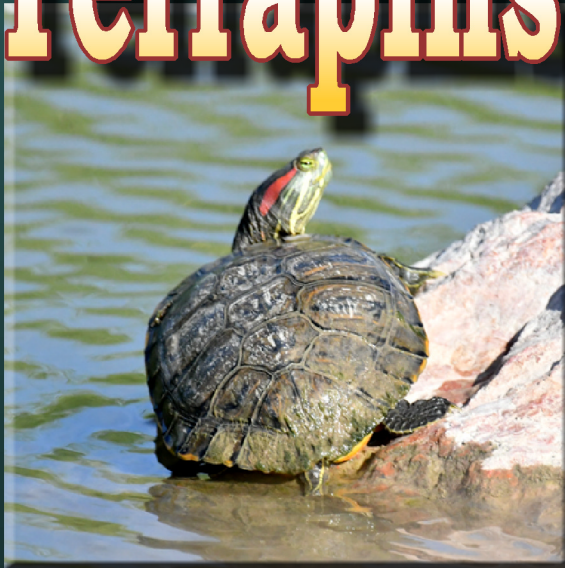
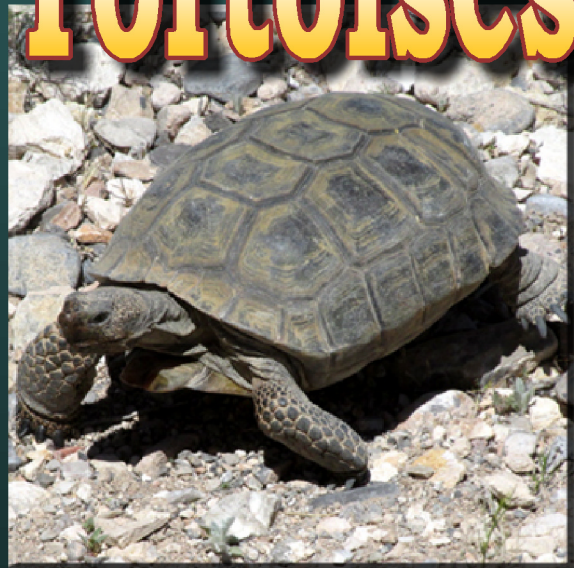


TESTUDINES (Turtles)

Terrapins



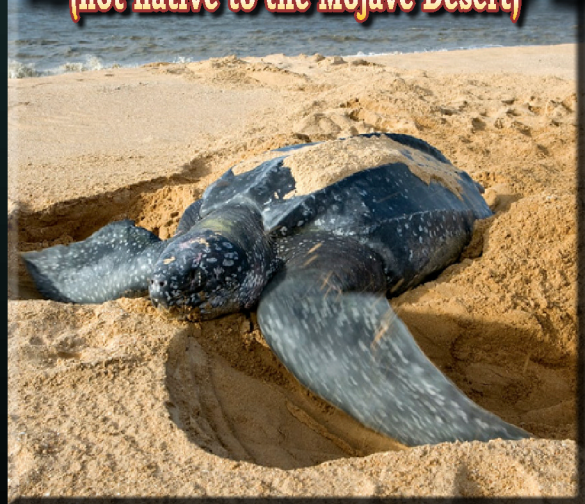
Tortoises



Softshells



Sea Turtles (not native to the Mojave Desert)



Family **EMYDIDAE** (Terrapins)

Red-Eared Slider (*Trachemys scripta elegans*)



enjoying a peaceful aquatic lifestyle

Clark Co. Wetlands Park; NV



communal basking spa

Clark Co. Wetlands Park; NV

Measurements:

Average Length: 7"

Distinguishing Field Characteristics:

distinctive red stripe on the side of the head; brown to olive green in adults (juveniles bright green); slides off basking spot into water, thus the descriptive group name "pond slider"

Notes:

common in still, warm, aquatic waters (ponds, swamps, streams, etc.); native range extends from se CO, east to VA, south to FL; feral elsewhere due to accidental or intentional release; most popular pet turtle species; eats mainly aquatic plants, but will also consume insects, small fish, etc.; 1 of 3 subspecies of *T. scripta*

Mojave presence: feral; rare

Comments:

Sliders are a perfect example of what can happen when pet owners release their unwanted charges into the wild. In many cases, such animals simply don't survive long enough to propagate. But others adapt, survive, and reproduce, creating viable populations that thrive in their new habitats and outcompete plants and animals specifically adapted to their native environments. The invasion of Burmese pythons in the Everglades is a prime example. The consequences can be permanently catastrophic. Fortunately, such is not the case in the [Clark County Wetlands Park](#) near Las Vegas, Nevada, where these sliders can be enjoyed at the preserve without concern or guilt.



proudly showing off its distinctive red ear patch

Clark Co. Wetlands Park; NV



swaddled in the finest of algal apparel

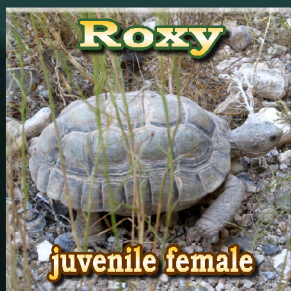
Clark Co. Wetlands Park; NV

Family TESTUDINIDAE (Tortoises)

Desert Tortoise (*Gopherus agassizii*)



Red Rock Canyon NCA; NV



RRCNCA Tortoise Habitat; NV



RRCNCA Tortoise Habitat; NV



RRCNCA Tortoise Habitat; NV

Measurements:

Average Length: 12" Average weight: 10 lbs

Distinguishing Field Characteristics:

terrestrial; males slightly larger than females, and possess a longer gular (forward-most scute on plastron)

Notes:

rare and reclusive (considered **THREATENED**), many have been relocated to protected habitats; native to the Mojave and Sonoran Deserts west of the Colorado River; diurnal to crepuscular; strictly herbivorous (e.g. grasses, flowers, cacti, fruit); brumates in winter

Mojave presence: rare; year-round

Comments:

With habitat destruction due to urban growth, and relocation to conservation locations, tortoises have become increasingly

rare to encounter in the wild. The best opportunity for Mojave Desert visitors to see and appreciate these tortoises is in the spring through fall at the [Red Rock Canyon National Conservation Area](#) tortoise habitat at the visitor center.

Hugo, a favorite with guests, was a pet that was abandoned in a backyard and left with only a bag of dog food to eat (not customary cuisine for a tortoise)! Consequently, he grew to an abnormally large size (33 pounds), flattened carapace, and extensively large gular! Thus, he is not representative of the species. More typical is Mojave Max who weighs in at a more fitting 12 pounds, and can be expected to entertain guests well into his eighties!

In the tortoises' best interest, it is not prudent to pick them up, as they will dispense their precious--and hard to replace--water supply to ward off handlers. However, since they are particularly vulnerable to being squashed while slowly crossing a road, a helping hand is better than the alternative! Talk to the pedestrian softly, let him know you're there to help, then pick him up gently just off the ground (tortoises don't like heights) and carry him to safety in the same direction he was going. It is certain he will appreciate your kindness!

The youngster shown here is the only baby tortoise I have ever encountered in the wild. We crossed paths in southern Nevada's [Valley of Fire State Park](#) in March, 2026. Note his tiny size compared to my boot print (right). Let's wish him the best in his long and arduous journey



Family TRIONYCHIDAE (Softshells)

Texas Spiny Softshell (*Apalone spinifera emoryi*)



Clark Co. Wetlands Park; NV



Clark Co. Wetlands Park; NV



Measurements:
Average Length: (m) 7" (f) 13"
Distinguishing Field Characteristics:
round, flat, leathery, somewhat flexible carapace, brown to olive in color, usually with yellow edge; fleshy, tubular, pig-like snout; webbed feet; (m) short, blunt spines on front edge

Notes:
nominate subspecies, *A.s.spinifera*, common in US Midwest in rivers, lakes, irrigation ditches, etc.; *A.s.emoryi* introduced to Colorado River system (native to TX, NM); feeds mainly on crayfish, snails, aquatic insects, small fish, etc., and some plant material; highly aquatic, can breathe and respire under water, thus can stay submerged for extended periods

Mojave presence: rare; mainly along Col. River drainage basin



Lorenzi Park; LV, NV

Comments:

Obviously, this aquatic denizen needs a watery environment to survive and prosper, and if you haven't noticed, the Mojave is a desert! Thus, as expected, spiny softshells are rare in the region. While they can be seen at urban ponds, such as [Lorenzi Park](#) in Las Vegas (above, lower right), in the wild they will only be found within reliable riparian habitats. [Las Vegas Wash](#) sweeping through the [Clark County Wetlands Park](#) is one such rare candidate. Even here, however, sightings can be unpredictable.