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ADOPT
an **Animal**



AFRICAN SPURRED TORTOISE

Geochelone sulcata

AFRICAN SPURRED TORTOISE | *Geochelone sulcata*

CLASS: Reptilia | ORDER: Testudines | FAMILY: Testudinidae

PROFILE

Birthday: 1997

Favorite treat: Strawberries

Weight: 84 pounds

Loves to: Spend all day basking in the warm sun

Conservation status: Vulnerable

LIVING IN A SHELL. The African spurred tortoise is the largest mainland tortoise, easily reaching 30 inches in length and well over 100 pounds in heft. Some males even reach 200 pounds! It is surpassed only by the island dweller tortoises from Aldabra and Galápagos.

Turtles and tortoises are a very old group of reptiles, going back about 220 million years. Of all the animals with backbones, turtles are the only ones that also have a shell, made up of 59 to 61 bones covered by plates called scutes, which are made of keratin like our fingernails. The turtle cannot crawl out of it because the shell is

permanently attached to the spine and the rib cage. The shell's top is called the carapace, and the bottom is the plastron. Turtles can feel pressure and pain through their shells, just as you can feel pressure through your fingernails.

COOL DENS. Given the sizzling hot climate where it lives—where days can reach 120 degrees Fahrenheit—this tortoise digs dens up to 10 feet deep to recline in during the heat of the day. These underground havens are significantly cooler than the air above ground, dipping into the 70s. These dens are often the only respite for other animals as well, so they reuse abandoned tortoise burrows.

FUN FACTS

The name “sulcata” is a Latin word for “furrow,” which are found on the tortoise’s back between each scute.

This tortoise can go weeks without food or water, and when it finds a water source it can drink up to 15 percent of its body weight!

These animals find relief from the desert heat by digging burrows up to 10 feet deep.

GOING GREEN. In their native habitat, these tortoises eat grasses, flowers, weeds, and cacti. Like all tortoises, they are herbivores; excessive protein and lack of proper lighting, diet, calcium, and vitamin D3 can lead to irregular bone growth and carapace deformities. Our sulcatas are fed chopped greens, Bermuda hay, and fresh fruit.