

Lake Mead

Environmental Education

National Recreation Area
National Park Service



CLASSROOM PROGRAM

Grade 3 - "Tortoise Tracks"

Theme The special adaptations of the desert tortoise enable it to survive in the Mojave Desert.

Objectives Students will identify at least two adaptations of the desert tortoise which enable the reptile to survive in desert conditions.
Students will observe, compare, measure, record, and identify parts of the desert tortoise.
Students will identify at least one reason why the Mojave population of the desert tortoise is in decline.
Students will identify at least one way they can help protect the desert tortoise.

Vocabulary adaptation - a physical or behavioral feature of an animal or plant that helps it survive in its environment
carapace - the upper shell of a tortoise
plastron - the bottom shell of a tortoise
reptile - a cold-blooded animal that has a backbone and skin covered with scales and bony plates
scute - a bony plate on a tortoise shell
threatened species - a classification given to a species that are likely to become endangered if present trends continue

Background Information The desert tortoise is one of the most well-adapted animals living in the Mojave Desert. A tortoise's daily activities, its burrow, skin, claws, mouth, unique water storage, and other physical characteristics all help the tortoise survive in such a hot, dry environment.

In April of 1990 the Mojave population of the desert tortoise was federally listed as a "threatened" species under provisions of the Endangered Species Act (1973).

Before the Ranger Visits your Classroom Ask your students what pets they have at home. How do they take care of a pet (feeding, etc.)? Compare pets versus wild animals. What do we do for our pets that we don't do for wild animals? Could what we do for a pet be harmful to a wild animal?

After the Ranger Visits your Classroom Now that your students are "card-carrying members" of the Tortoise Patrol, have them come up with a reminder of ways to protect desert tortoises. This could be a poster, calendar, stories, poems, a rap, photo collage, or any other creative ideas! We would love to hear from your students about their creative reminder!



Teachers! - check out our new web site at <http://www.nps.gov/lame/classindex.htm>