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Desert Tortoise (*Gopherus agassizii*)

Under a full head of steam, the desert tortoise moves at a stolid pace of about 20 feet per minute. This patient vegetarian has existed on Earth almost unchanged for millions of years. It is found in the southwestern desert areas of California where it now enjoys protected status as an endangered species. The desert tortoise played a key role in the passage of the California Desert Protection Act in 1994. To protect the fragile desert habitat of the tortoise and other plants and animals, millions of acres were added to the national park and wilderness system. Supporters reportedly brought a desert tortoise to the White House for the bill signing. The tortoise has been the official State Reptile since 1972. *Source: Courtesy California State Library*



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