

Aldabra Tortoise

Dipsochelys dussumieri



Physical Characteristics

- They are dark grayish/black in color and have a thick, domed carapace, a very long neck (to help them branch feeding), and short, thick legs. The limbs and head are covered in bony scales.
- Mature males are larger than females with a lower carapace which gets wider at the rear with longer, thicker tails.

Size

- Length: 35 to 55 in
- Weight: 350 to 550 pounds

Lifespan

- Wild: The estimated lifespan is 150 years or more.
- Zoos: Up to 176 years old.

Behaviors

- Terrestrial
- Active mainly over a period of less than four hours in the early morning and late evening.
 - Aldabra giant tortoises engage in various activities including stretching, walking, feeding, sleeping, mating attempts, and defecation during these times. They rest for the remainder of the day.
- Social Structure: found both individually and in aggregate herds in areas with plenty of food.
 - Move seasonally between habitats. During dry seasons, tortoises are dispersed evenly throughout the various habitats. When the first rain occurs, tortoises migrate towards the open grasslands and coastal scrub areas.

Diet

- Wild: primarily herbivores and feed mainly on vegetation such as grasses, leaves, woody plant stems, a variety of herbs and sedges. They are flexible and opportunistic and will sometimes supplement their diets with small invertebrates.
- Zoo: fruits, such as apples, pears, tomatoes and bananas, carrots, peas, beans, almonds, and compressed vegetable pellets.

Reproduction

- Incubation Period: 110-250 days
- Parenting: They do not provide parental care for their young after females have deposited the eggs in a safe nest. The young hatch and dig out of the nest on their own.
- Clutch Size: Females lay between 4 and 14 eggs in a shallow, dry nest. Typically, less than half are fertile. The average clutch size increases in captivity, where females lay about 9 to 25 eggs.
- Breeding Behaviors: The breeding season occurs from February to May. The initiation of the mating attempt begins with a male approaching a female and climbing onto her back with his neck fully extended. Sometimes the male appears to bite at the female's head. Often the female will respond to the male's mount by walking away or propping herself up on her forelegs, forcing her rear into the ground and dislodging the male. Males appear to be promiscuous in their selection of prospective partners, not all of which are necessarily female. Most mating attempts are not successful.
- Average age at reproductive maturity (male): 25 years

Habitat and Range

- Habitat: Scrub forests, mangrove swamps, and coastal dunes and beaches
- Range: Aldabra Atoll of the Seychelles, an archipelago nation in the western Indian Ocean about 930 miles east of Africa and northeast of Madagascar. Populations have also been introduced to Mauritius, Réunion, and islands in central Seychelles.

Conservation

- IUCN Status: Vulnerable
- Listed on the CITES Appendix II
- Contributing factors: Considered vulnerable due to years of human poaching and encroachment. Translocation of these tortoises has been unsuccessful, partly due to inadequate attention to human-related habitat interactions. Human poaching has significantly jeopardized chances of establishing populations that will survive far into the future.
- Predators: Humans hunt tortoises and their eggs for meat. Adult Aldabra giant tortoises have no other natural predators.

Classification

- Kingdom: Animalia
- Phylum: Chordata
- Subphylum: Vertebrata
- Class: Reptilia
- Order: Testudines
- Family: Testudinidae
- Genus: Dipsochelys
- Species: *D. dussumieri*

Interesting Facts

- Aldabra giant tortoises are the second largest living terrestrial species of tortoise.
- Aldabra giant tortoises are one of the few surviving species of Indian Ocean giant tortoises.
- As they grow, tissue is added to the shell concentrically and is marked by radial striations, or growth rings.
- Sexual maturity is determined by size rather than by age; most individuals begin to reproduce when they reach approximately half their full-grown size, usually around 25 years of age.

