

Leopard Tortoise

Stigmochelys pardalis

Class: *Sauropsida*

Order: *Chelonia*

Family: *Testudinidae*

Characteristics:

The leopard tortoise is the fourth largest tortoise species in the world. They get their name from their color pattern on the elevated carapace, or shell. The rings of yellow, tan, and brown resemble leopard spots. These tortoises can reach up to two feet in length and weigh up to 80 pounds (National Zoo). Tortoises lack ears, but can sense vibrations from the surrounding environment. They also lack teeth, but have a sharp beak for tearing into foods. These tortoises are well adapted to hot, arid areas (Maryland Zoo).

Behavior:

Leopard tortoises are considered crepuscular. They try to seek shade and avoid activity during the hottest parts of the day in the savannah sun. They spend most of their time grazing on grasses (Maryland Zoo). If threatened, a leopard tortoise has been known to poop on its predator. Males compete for females during mating season by pushing each other until one is flipped upside down (National Zoo).

Reproduction:

Females will dig a nest about one foot deep and will lay up to 30 eggs in the nest. The eggs will hatch about 18 months after they are laid. Neither the male nor female are involved in parenting the offspring.

Diet:

Wild: grasses and succulents (prickly pear cactus)

Zoo: mixed greens, sweet potato, apple, carrot, tomato, oranges, clovite, hay, tortoise pellet.

Conservation:

Leopard tortoises are listed as least concern by IUCN Redlist. They are not an SSP species. They are believed to be abundant in Africa, and have a very large range. Leopard tortoises are the most common tortoise in Africa.

FYI:

Tortoises, turtles and terrapins are differentiated by where they live.

Tortoises usually live completely on land, while turtles live predominantly in water. Terrapins are found both on land and in water.



Range & Habitat:

Leopard tortoises are found in sub-Saharan Africa, from Sudan south to the Cape Province of South Africa. They are often found in savannah grasslands (Reptile Database).



Lifespan: over 100 years in captivity, up to 100 years in the wild.

Special Adaptations: Leopard tortoises have the ability to pull their entire body inside the shell for defense against predators.

IUCN Conservation Status:

Least Concern

