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# African Spurred Tortoise

*Centrochelys sulcata*

**Class:** *Reptilia*

**Order:** *Testudines*

**Family:** *Testudinidae*

## Characteristics:

Also known as the Sulcata tortoise, grooved tortoise, spur tortoise and Africa spur thigh tortoise. African spurred tortoises are the largest tortoise on the mainland of Africa and is the third largest tortoise species in the world. They have a broad, oval carapace that can reach a length of 24-30 inches and they weigh over 100 pounds. The largest one ever recorded weighed 240 pounds! They can be identified by the well-defined spurs on the back of their rear legs. The growth rings on their scutes (shell scales) have prominent serrations which become more defined with age. They have well defined claws for digging deep desert burrows.

## Behavior:

African spurred tortoises can be found in the hottest, driest areas of Africa. They do not hibernate but will burrow to avoid inclement weather as they cannot tolerate damp cold. They prefer areas with high illumination and constant warmth. These tortoises are very aggressive toward one another, from the moment they hatch, and get more aggressive during breeding season. Males will often ram into each other and try to flip one another over. ([Arkive](#))

## Reproduction:

Mating can occur at any time, but in the wild is most common after the rainy season, between September and November. The female may dig several nests before deciding on a nesting site in which she lays a clutch of 15 to 30 eggs. The eggs will incubate underground for about eight months.

## Diet:

Wild: herbivores-plants and grasses, a diet very high in fiber

Zoo: vegetables and hay. In fact, fruits or protein rich foods can make them sick

## Conservation:

Sulcatas are considered vulnerable because of the illegal pet trade and also because people in Africa eat them.

## FYI:

African spurred tortoises are crepuscular, meaning they come out during dawn and dusk, when temperatures are optimal. The rest of the time they hide in their underground burrows. They will share their burrows with other animals.



## **Range & Habitat:**

Arid, dry areas of northern Africa



**Lifespan:** over 150 years in captivity and around 50+ in the wild.

## **Special Adaptations**

Sulcatas are important in promoting vegetative growth around their burrowing sites.

Seeds germinate after going through their intestines and their moist manure literally grows a garden around their burrows.

## **IUCN Conservation Status:**

Vulnerable

