

Desert Tortoise Burrow Identification



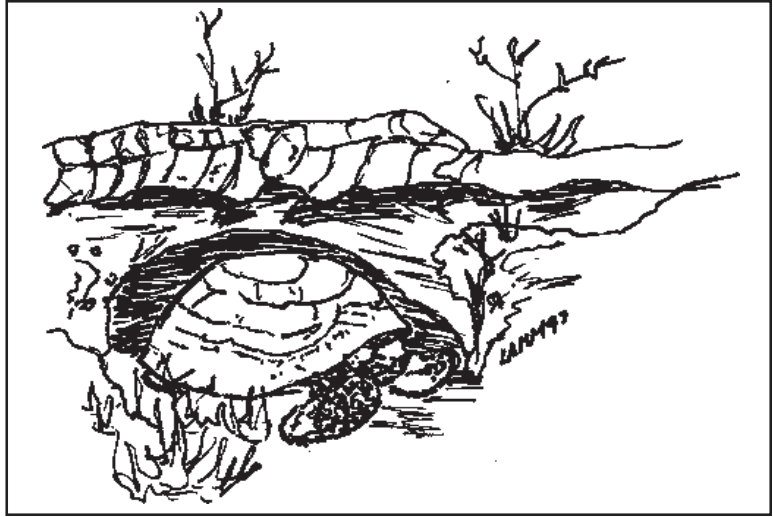
Photo: U.S. Army, Fort Irwin, CA

Desert tortoises use burrows for shelter against extreme temperatures, since burrows stay relatively cool in summer and relatively warm in winter. The tortoises dig their burrows in dry gravelly soil beneath creosote bushes or other large shrubs in open desert, or in the banks of sandy loam soils of washes.

California Department of Pesticide Regulation
Endangered Species Program
<https://www.cdpr.ca.gov>



Desert Tortoise Burrows



Desert tortoise burrow entrances are half-moon shaped, just like the profiles of tortoise shells, this characteristic shape is consistent in all age groups, thus a burrow occupied by a juvenile tortoise is a miniature version of an adult one.

The burrows vary in depth, some just deep enough to house a single tortoise, while others may dig tunnels almost 10 feet deep. On occasion, a tortoise will take cover under a bush or any natural shelter. The burrows are often crucial to survival, especially in hot weather when the direct rays of the sun can kill a tortoise in an hour or less.

In some desert locations, tortoise burrows can be found as part of complex burrow systems that might be simultaneously occupied by other species such as burrowing owls and antelope ground squirrels.