

Arizona Wildlife Podcast Comprehension Activity

Episode 9: Desert Tortoise Survey

Part A: Determine whether each statement below is true or false. If it is false, correct the statement so that it will be true.

1. Desert tortoises have strong claws for catching their prey.
False. Desert tortoises use their claws for digging. They are strictly herbivores and do not eat other animals.
2. Desert tortoises will spend up to 95% of their time underground in their burrow.
True.
3. Tortoises cannot typically turn themselves over if they are flipped on their back.
False. Often, tortoises are able to flip themselves back over. If they do not do so in a timely manner, they could overheat in the sun.
4. It takes about one year for a desert tortoise egg to hatch.
True. Although they could hatch in less time, this length allows them to hatch when food resources will be at a maximum, during the monsoons.

Part B: Define each of the terms below.

1. Ectothermic – **cold-blooded, needs to use the environment to regulate internal body temperature**
2. Exudate – **a fluid that is released during an infection or injury**
3. Occluded – **closed or obstructed**
4. Plastron – **the underside (belly) of a turtle or tortoise shell**
5. Scat – **the solid waste or fecal droppings of an animal**

Part C: Answer each question below in complete sentences. The answers are not necessarily included in the content. They may require some critical thinking.

1. When desert tortoises are discovered with an upper respiratory infection, they are not treated. Why?

To date, there has been no successful treatment for this infection. Some attempts have been made, including using antibiotics, but all of these involve a long-term medical plan that is not practical for wild tortoises.

2. Physical adaptations are features of an animal's body structure that allow them to survive in their environment while behavioral adaptations are things an animal does to survive. List two physical and two behavioral adaptations of the desert tortoise and explain how each helps it survive. **Note: The examples provided below are ones mentioned in the podcast. Other answers may be acceptable.**

Physical: Sharp claws – digging; Stumpy legs – allows it to travel just about anywhere (think about a tank); Hard shell – protection from predators. Behavioral: Burrow – escape the heat; Bask – heat up body; Fighting – compete for a mate or protect territory