

# WILD CANDIDATES "85"

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Arizona Game & Fish File Photo

## Gila Monster - (*Heloderma suspectum*)

Arizona's largest lizard, the Gila monster may reach two feet in length. Its scientific name is *Heloderma suspectum*. In Greek *Heloderma* means wart-skin, a reference to the beaded scales. *Suspectum* means distrusted in Latin.

Gila monsters are irregularly patterned in black and buff, orange or pink. The back and head are covered with round scales, giving the appearance and feel of beadwork. The blunt, swollen tail is a fat storage organ.

The Gila monster occurs from southwestern Utah and northeastern Nevada through Arizona into northern Sonora, Mexico. They are often associated with permanent and intermittent streams through desert scrub and grasslands, extending barely into oak woodlands in Arizona. They utilize rodent or tortoise burrows or dig their own, often living in holes in rocky washes.

The Gila monster and its cousin, the Mexican beaded lizard, are the only venomous lizards in the world. Since Gila monsters only bite when people attempt to pick them up, bites are rare. In addition to baby rodents and rabbits, Gila monsters forage on bird and tortoise eggs and nestling birds.

Active from April until October, Gila monsters spend the coldest months hibernating. Life expectancies in the wild are not known but Gila monsters have lived for 20 years in captivity. Apparently reasonably well distributed in appropriate habitats, the Gila monster is generally not threatened except in urban areas.

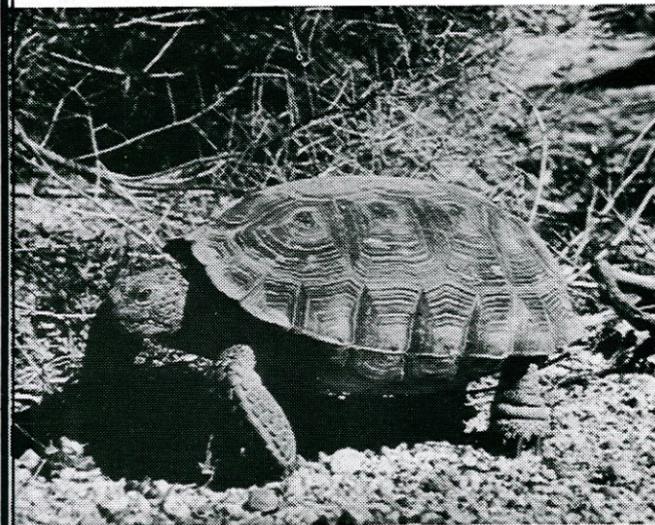


Photo By: C. Schwalbe

## Desert Tortoise - (*Gopherus agassizii*)

The desert tortoise and its relative, the box turtle, are the only land turtles native to Arizona. Its scientific name is derived from a French word (*gaufre*) used to describe any burrowing animal and *agassizii* for Louis Agassiz, an early American herpetologist. Like all reptiles, the desert tortoise has a body covered by scales. The main portion of its body is protected by large scutes (or plates) that cover a layer of interlocking bones.

Adult males, which are larger than females, often attain 10 to 14" in length and weighs as much as 8½ pounds. The desert tortoise lives as long as 75 to 100 years in the wild. Tortoises are usually a faded dark brown color. Desert tortoises reproduce by laying eggs, as do all other turtles and tortoises. Each clutch usually contains from 5 to 7 white eggs. The egg-laying season extends from May through July.

In Arizona, the desert tortoise is found up to elevations of 4500 feet from the northwestern corner of the state, southeasterly to Tucson and near Nogales and west into California. Its habitat is the saguaro and palo verde covered slopes of rocky foothills and low mountains. It is also found in desert areas with creosote bushes and Joshua trees and other yuccas.

Desert tortoises are almost entirely herbivorous, or plant-eating. In the wild, they eat a variety of grasses, cacti, wildflowers, fruits and many other green herbs and even shrubs. Although it is against the law to sell a desert tortoise in Arizona, many people do keep them as pets. Any legal hunting license holder may take and possess one desert tortoise. No person may possess more than one tortoise legally.

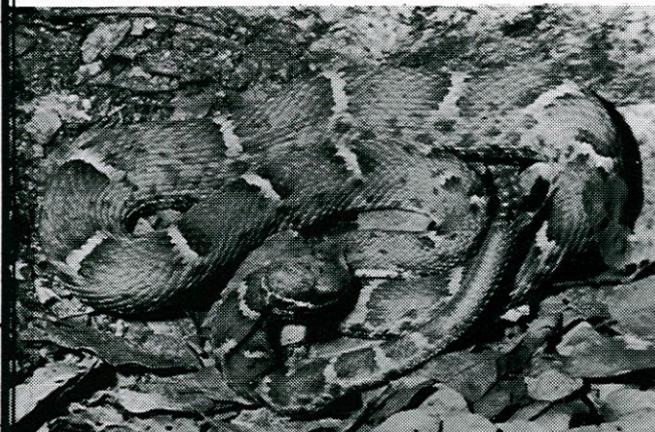


Photo By: C. Schwalbe

## Arizona Ridgenose Rattlesnake - (*Crotalus willardi*)

The Arizona ridgenose rattlesnake is one of eleven species, or types, of rattlesnakes that occur in Arizona, more than any other state! Its scientific name, *Crotalus willardi*, comes from *crotalum*, the Greek word for rattle, and *willardi*, for Frank C. Willard, the Tombstone man who first found one in the wild. It was the last rattlesnake named by herpetologists in the U. S.

The Arizona ridgenose rattlesnake is a small snake. Rarely does an adult ridgenose weigh more than 3 or 4 ounces. Newborn ridgenoses are usually 6-8" long and may weigh as little as one-fourth of an ounce (as much as a hummingbird). Its up-turned nose scales gives this species its common name. Its most characteristic markings are bold, white stripes on its brown face. The pattern is very much like that of the war paint that the Chiricahua Apaches wore.

The range of the Arizona ridgenose rattlesnake covers only a few mountain ranges in south-central Arizona. Throughout its range, the ridgenose generally occurs at elevations of 5000 to 8000 feet in cool canyons with oaks and pines. Ridgenose rattle-snakes are quite secretive, being active mainly in early morning or late afternoon. On a very humid afternoon, they can sometimes be found quietly seeking the lizards, centipedes, small snakes or small mice that are their main food.

The Arizona ridgenose rattlesnake is perhaps the most beautiful of all our state's rattlesnakes. Because the type of habitat they prefer is threatened by many of man's activities, the ridgenose is on the list of "Threatened Native Wildlife in Arizona."

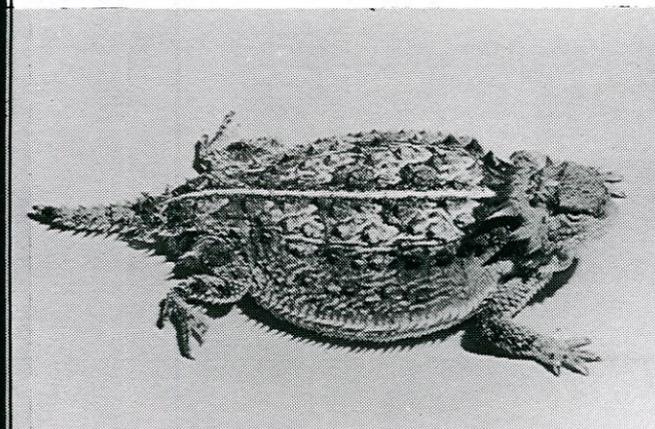


Photo By: M. J. Funquette

## Regal Horned Lizard - (*Phrynosoma solare*)

The four spines on the back of its head (the bases touching) form a distinctive crown, hence its common name, the regal horned lizard. The scientific name, *Phrynosoma solare*, means the "toad-body of the sun," a reference to its squatty shape and the desert region where it is found. Sometimes erroneously called "horny toads," horned lizards are actually reptiles with scales on a dry skin, with claws on the toes and laying eggs with a leathery shell.

For a horned lizard, the regal is large, reaching a total length of about 7 inches. In color it may vary from light grey or tan to a reddish brown. The regal horned lizard is found in southern Arizona south into northern Sinaloa, Mexico. It lives on rocky and gravelly areas in arid or semi-arid regions. In Arizona it is found in Sonoran desert scrub among cactus, mesquite and creosote bush, extending into semidesert grassland in Cochise County.

Like most other horned lizards, the regal eats primarily ants and other insects. They can often be found by walking around active ant hills in the mornings and late afternoons during the warm months of the year. After mating in the summer, females lay their leathery eggs (often 20 or more) in sandy soil in July and August. The young hatch in September and October.

Being very slow, horned lizards rely on concealing coloration for defense. When sitting motionless they are very difficult to see. When molested, they may inflate the lungs to appear large and present their crown of horns in defense. Rarely, individuals will expel a fine stream of blood from their eyes when disturbed.