

Turtles and Tortoises

Turtles and tortoises have been on the earth for millions of years. In fact, there were turtles on earth along with the dinosaurs! Turtles and tortoises are reptiles with outer shells that are part of their skeletons. Their shells are actually made up of about sixty different bones that are connected together. Turtles and tortoises use their shells for protection from predators. They can pull their head and legs inside the shell so they can hide from their enemies. Tortoises are turtles that live on land. Some turtles spend part of the time on land and part of the time in the water. Others, like sea turtles, live in the water all of the time, except when females go on land to lay their eggs. Turtles and tortoises are found throughout the world in most climates. As reptiles, they are cold-blooded, meaning that their body temperature changes depending on the temperature of their environment. In areas that have cold winters, turtles hibernate because they cannot function well in the cold. Like other reptiles, turtles and tortoises shed their skin. They also shed the outside layers of their shells.

Tortoises and turtles do not have teeth. Instead, they have very strong jaws that they can use to tear food apart. They eat plants, worms and shellfish. Sea turtles also eat sponges, seaweed and crabs. In contrast, tortoises usually have round, bumpy shells and thick legs. Their thick, heavy shells make it harder for land animals to eat them. Turtles, on the other hand, have webbed feet and light, flat shells. Sea turtles actually have flippers. Their light shells and webbed feet or flippers make swimming easier for turtles. In fact, turtles are usually fast swimmers. On land, however, most of them move very slowly, though there are some species that can move very quickly and can even outrun humans! Turtles also have long necks so they can lift their heads out of the water to breathe. They can hold their breath under water for a long time and even sleep under water, but turtles breathe through lungs, so eventually they have to come up for air.

Baby turtles and tortoises hatch from eggs that the female buries in the sand or soil. The baby uses a special sharp tooth on its snout to crack through the shell when it is ready to hatch. Adult turtles can be anywhere from four inches to eight feet long. Sea turtles are the largest turtles, while bog turtles are the smallest. The Galapagos tortoise is the largest tortoise. Found in the Galapagos Islands off the west coast of South America, these tortoises can reach lengths of five to six feet and live for up to 200 years. Most turtles have shorter life spans of less than 100 years.

Turtles and Tortoises Questions

1. Turtles and tortoises are
 - a. marine mammals.
 - b. reptiles.
 - c. amphibians.
 - d. descendants of prehistoric fish.

2. Tortoises live
 - a. on land.
 - b. in the water.
 - c. both on land and in water.
 - d. in trees.

3. Turtles
 - a. are warm blooded.
 - b. are cold blooded.
 - c. always have the same body temperature.
 - d. can adapt well to cold weather.

4. Turtles and tortoises
 - a. use gills to breathe underwater.
 - b. do not shed their skin.
 - c. have strong teeth.
 - d. have strong jaws.

5. A turtle's shell
 - a. is one large bone.
 - b. keeps it warm.
 - c. protects it from predators.
 - d. All of these

Turtles and Tortoises Questions (Cont'd)

6. Name three things that turtles eat.

7. How long have turtles been on the earth?
 - a. for only a few hundred years
 - b. for about 10,000 years
 - c. since the time of dinosaurs
 - d. since the beginning of time

8. Which does not describe the difference between turtles and tortoises?
 - a. Tortoises have webbed feet and turtles do not.
 - b. Tortoises live on land; turtles live in the water.
 - c. Tortoises have heavier shells than turtles.
 - d. Turtles have longer necks than tortoises.

9. The largest turtle is the
 - a. bog turtle
 - b. boxer turtle
 - c. sea turtle
 - d. Galapagos tortoise

10. How long can a Galapagos tortoise live?

Name _____



Date _____

Turtles and Tortoises Answers

1. b
2. a
3. b
4. d
5. c
6. plants, worms and shellfish
7. c
8. a
9. c
10. 200 years