

Five Reasons to Not Buy a Turtle or Tortoise for Holiday Gifts

American Tortoise Rescue Suggests Fun Toys or Donations Instead

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[Tortoise Rescue](#), the international nonprofit sanctuary for turtle and tortoise protection, is asking that no live animals, including turtles and tortoises, be purchased for holiday gifts.

According to Susan Tellem, co-founder of American Tortoise Rescue (ATR), while turtles and tortoises outlived the dinosaurs, illegal smuggling, habitat destruction, the commercial pet trade and live food markets in turtles and tortoises has devastated populations worldwide. Many once thriving species are now threatened or endangered. Worse, some are now extinct.

"The pet industry thrives on impulse buys of small, adorable exotic animals with a big price tag," Tellem says. "What we are recommending this holiday season is to avoid impulse buys. We understand the appeal of an adorable two inch baby tortoise," Tellem adds, "But like most animal rescues, many rescues through the U.S. and Canada have many just as appealing turtles and tortoises ready for adoption to good homes." She added that it is illegal to buy or sell any turtle under four inches long in the U.S. and has been since 1974.

Tellem gives five reasons why people shouldn't buy a turtle or tortoise as a gift.

1. Turtles are boring for children. Kids will not find everlasting love in an animal that basically sits still most of the day sunning itself. Many kids tire of a turtle in a tank and don't want to clean the habitat or change the water. Turtles and tortoises poop, Tellem reminds everyone.

2. Most turtles and many tortoises are already hibernating at this time of year. It's unnatural for them to be awake and available for sale when they should be sleeping from about October through April. It's cruel to sell wild animals that need to hibernate to stay healthy.



Popcorn at American Tortoise Rescue

3. Turtles and tortoises confined in tanks are miserable. It's like a human spending their entire life in a bathtub, Tellem says. The only proper habitat for these animals is outside. The sun exposure helps maintain a healthy shell and is necessary for the animal to grow and thrive. During hibernation, most reptiles can stay outside in shelters that are dry and fire and predator proof.

4. Adoption is the ideal option, Tellem says. During the spring, when the animals awake, rescues help place them in good "forever homes" with proper habitats. In most cases, there is no charge to adopt, only the promise that the animal will be given exceptional care for the rest of its life.

5. Turtles can easily live 25 to 50 years or more and tortoises can top 100 years. An impulse buy without a thought to the future is not in the best interest of the animal. Plans need to be made in wills and with family members since the animals can outlive their owners. Most people don't think about that when they buy a turtle or tortoise.

Tellem, who founded the nonprofit 30 years ago with her husband, Marshall Thompson, says, "Many owners assume that when the tortoise becomes a problem, zoos or rescues will take them. This is simply not true. Zoos are not interested in cast-off pets and rescues often do not have any more room." She adds that a domesticated pet cannot be put back into the wild. It will die or introduce disease into an already precarious wild ecosystem. In many states, it is also illegal. The best solution is to find a compassionate adopter who is willing to give a proper "forever home" to the pet. There are many national rescue organizations listed on <http://www.tortoise.com/turtle-rescue-centers-in-usa.html> which can facilitate adoptions if people are interested in getting an animal.

One way to enjoy a turtle or tortoise without harming them is to give the perfect holiday gift – a one year adoption certificate of a special needs turtle or tortoise at ATR make a donation to a nonprofit like American Tortoise Rescue. "This allows us to facilitate rescues to other groups and care for the ones that are ill or have special needs. If a donor makes a \$250 donation or more, we send them an adoption certificate featuring one of our permanent residents, and it's good for one year. People enjoy that because they can care for the animal vicariously," Tellem says.

American Tortoise Rescue, Malibu, Calif., is a nonprofit founded in 1990 to provide for the protection of all species of tortoise and turtle. For more information, visit www.tortoise.com and www.worldturtleday.org; contact: American Tortoise Rescue at info@tortoise.com; follow on Twitter and Instagram @tortoiserescue and on Facebook and YouTube.

Quick facts/tweets

- The commercial pet trade in turtles and tortoises has devastated populations worldwide.
- Many once thriving species are now threatened or endangered. Worse, some are now extinct.

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