

Giant Sulcata Tortoises Overwhelm U.S. Rescues

American Tortoise Rescue Calls for a Halt on Sales and Breeding

MALIBU, CA, UNITED STATES, June 14, 2021 /EINPresswire.com/ -- [American Tortoise Rescue](#) (ATR), Malibu, CA, is calling on the pet industry, reptile wholesalers and private breeders to stop the breeding and sale of giant tortoises commonly called sulcatas.

Geochelone [sulcata](#) is a hardy and personable species of tortoise. Native to sub-Saharan Africa, it became part of the lucrative pet trade during the 1990s. Hatchlings have an engaging nature and are extremely cute making

them one of the most commonly purchased pet tortoises in North America, usually as an impulse buy. Unknown to the unwary buyer, however, is the fact that sulcatas are the third largest species of tortoise in the world weighing up to 200 pounds, often attaining a large and destructive size in a short period of time. Adult female sulcatas can easily produce 50 -100 eggs a year. It's not unusual to see hundreds of hatchlings for sale at reptile shows that sell for anywhere between \$100 and \$1,000.

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*Susan Tellem, RN, BSN,
Executive Director*



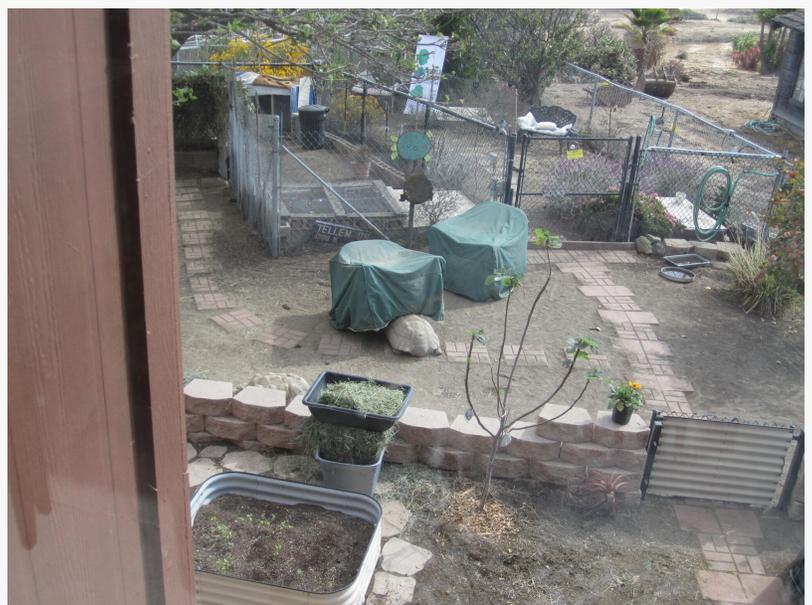
Popcorn at American Tortoise Rescue

According to Susan Tellem, co-founder of ATR, sulcata breeders and pet stores that sell them create problems that tortoise rescuers are expected to solve. "The pet industry looks for small, exotic animals to sell with a big price tag," Tellem says. "We've conducted a survey of sulcata owners about what they were told when they purchased their tortoises. Whether at a pet store or reptile show - the answer is the same. 'It won't get bigger than its

tank.' This is patently ridiculous and a deliberate lie." Worse, the sulcata which requires sunshine

and warm weather throughout the year is sold in all 50 states, many of which suffer freezing temperatures. "Minnesota and Wisconsin, for example, are terrible locations for a tortoise that must have constant sun/heat to avoid crippling metabolic bone disease."

Tellem adds, "Sulcata owners quickly become aware of the difficulties associated with having a potentially destructive non-housebroken animal of this size. A sulcata is strong and aggressive and can easily move furniture and damage or destroy items in and around a typical house or apartment. When they eat all the grass and plants, and dig massive holes on the property, we get desperate emails to rehome them." Rescues typically receive three or four calls a week from owners who want to get rid of their sulcatas, most often when they reach 50 pounds or 10 years of age. Many rescues do not charge a rehoming fee, so despite the high price tag at pet stores and with breeders, these animals are offered free to people with large yards who can offer good forever homes.



Tank destroys a lawn chair.



Tank enjoys fresh hay

Tellem, who founded the nonprofit 31 years ago with her husband, Marshall Thompson, says, "Many owners assume that when the tortoise becomes a problem, zoos will take them, which is not true. Zoos are not interested in 'cast-off' pets." Tellem says that the zoos instead refer people to her rescue. She has placed hundreds into good homes but this is extremely difficult because it is not easy finding places with a quarter-acre or very large yard the owners do not mind being destroyed. They do not hibernate, which means an owner must provide a large house with indestructible electric heat blankets for cold winter months.

"Since sulcatas can live 100 years or more, and because the males fight when placed together, and male and female sulcatas breed, overcrowded rescues quickly run out of space. At that point, there is no solution for the unhappy owner other than finding a new home through posting

at veterinarian's office or on a local homeowner's website like NextDoor," says Tellem. Tellem adds that some owners mistakenly think that they can sell the huge animal for a large profit. "There is no market for adult sulcatas," Tellem says. "The only option remaining for some cruel owners is to dump the sulcata in the wild where it will die a slow death by freezing or starving, or to give it up for adoption." Finding a compassionate adopter who is willing to put up with the destruction is not easy.

Tellem says that breeders won't turn their backs on an obvious money making machine. "So what we request is simply market driven economics. People shouldn't buy sulcatas. Pet stores should stop selling them. Reptile shows must have a 'no sulcata' policy. Only then will breeding stop."

American Tortoise Rescue (ATR), Malibu, Calif., is a nonprofit founded in 1990 to provide for the protection of all species of tortoise and turtle. It provides permanent sanctuary to abandoned and lost tortoises, as well as those that are confiscated from law enforcement. Celebrate [World Turtle Day™](#) (www.worldturtleday.org) which ATR founded in 2000 each year on May 23rd. For more information, visit American Tortoise Rescue at www.tortoise.com; email info@tortoise.com; like on Facebook <https://www.facebook.com/AmericanTortoiseRescue>; IG at [tortoiserescue](#); YouTube at [AmericanTortRescue](#); and on Twitter [@Tortoiserescue](#).

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