ANIMAL LEARNING CENTER · NOT CURRENTLY AT THE ZOO

GALÁPAGOS TORTOISE

Chelonoidis species

Teacher & Student Fact Sheet · © **2026 Plumpton Park Zoological Gardens Inc.**
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Fast facts

ANIMAL GROUP	Reptile — tortoise family (Testudinidae)
NATIVE REGION	Galápagos Islands, Ecuador
HABITAT	Dry lowlands to wetter highlands
DIET	Herbivore — grasses, shrubs, fruit, cactus
SIZE	Up to about 4½ ft long
WEIGHT	Can exceed 550 lb
LIFESPAN	More than 100 years
STATUS	Vulnerable to Critically Endangered, by species



A Galápagos giant tortoise. Photo: Magdalena Kula Manchee on Unsplash.

Did you know?

- Scientists count 12 or 13 living species of Galápagos giant tortoise; several others have gone extinct.
- Some have domed shells and some have saddle-shaped shells, depending on their island.
- A Galápagos tortoise can survive without food or water for up to a year.
- Each tortoise eats more than 500 pounds of plants a year.
- The Española tortoises came back from just 15 animals to more than 2,300.

Words to know

Herbivore: an animal that eats only plants.
Species: a group of living things that can breed with one another.
Saddleback: a tortoise shell that rises high at the front, like a saddle.
Head-starting: raising young animals safely before releasing them into the wild.

Where it lives in the wild



Lives in the wild ★ Plumpton Park Zoo, Rising Sun, MD

Think about it

1. How are domed and saddleback shells different, and how might the saddle shape help?
2. How can a Galápagos tortoise survive for months without food or water?
3. Which animals brought by people harm tortoises, and how?
4. How did the Española tortoises come back from only 15 animals?
5. How is a Galápagos tortoise different from an Aldabra tortoise?

Draw it

In the box below, draw two Galápagos tortoises: one with a domed shell on a green, wet island and one with a saddleback shell stretching up to eat a cactus. Label each part.

STANDARDS · GRADE 3 **WRITTEN FOR GRADES 3–5**

Maryland and Delaware (NGSS): **3-LS4-2 · 3-LS4-3 · 3-LS4-4**
Pennsylvania (STEELS): **3.1.3.F · 3.1.3.G · 3.1.3.H**

Draw here

Learn more: plumptonparkzoo.org/reptiles-and-amphibians/galapagos-tortoise/ · **Sources:** Galápagos Conservancy; Charles Darwin Foundation; Gaughran et al. (2024); Blake et al. (2024); IUCN Red List; Gibbs et al. (2014); Galapagos Conservation Trust.
Supports Maryland and Delaware (NGSS) and Pennsylvania (STEELS) standards: 3-LS4-2 (3.1.3.F) · 3-LS4-3 (3.1.3.G) · 3-LS4-4 (3.1.3.H)
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ANIMAL LEARNING CENTER · RESEARCH WORKSHEET

GALÁPAGOS TORTOISE

Before and after your research

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Before you research · 5 minutes

Name: _____ Date: _____

1. Predict: where in the wild does the Galápagos giant tortoise live?

Circle one (or more if it lives on more than one):

Africa | Asia | Australia | Europe | North America | South America

2. Predict: what does it eat?

☐ plants ☐ other animals ☐ both

3. Word hunt: find these words on page 1. Put a check by each one you already know.

☐ Herbivore ☐ Species ☐ Saddleback ☐ Head-starting

Pick one word and write what it means in your own words:

4. My question: one thing I want to find out about the Galápagos giant tortoise.

While you research

Read the animal page:
plumptonparkzoo.org/reptiles-and-amphibians/galapagos-tortoise/

Write two facts you did not know before.

Draw or describe one body part that helps it survive, and say how it helps.

Draw here

After your research · talk it over

1. Check your prediction. Native region: Galápagos Islands, Ecuador. Was your guess right?

☐ yes ☐ no ☐ partly

2. Diet check. The fact sheet says: Herbivore — grasses, shrubs, fruit, cactus. What did you learn about how it finds or eats food?

3. Discuss with a partner, then write your best answer.

- How can a Galápagos tortoise survive for months without food or water?
- Which animals brought by people harm tortoises, and how?

4. Exit ticket.

One thing I learned: _____

One thing I still wonder: _____

ADJUST IT

Grades K–2: talk and draw instead of writing; read the questions aloud. **Grades 6–8:** add evidence from the fact sheet and the animal page to every answer.

Learn more: plumptonparkzoo.org/reptiles-and-amphibians/galapagos-tortoise/ · Fact sheet page 1 has the fast facts, map and vocabulary this page refers to.

Grade 3 · Maryland and Delaware (NGSS): **3-LS4-2 · 3-LS4-3 · 3-LS4-4** · Pennsylvania (STEELS): **3.1.3.F · 3.1.3.G · 3.1.3.H**

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