

Western Bell's Hinge-back Tortoise

(*Kinixys belliana nogueyi*)

Habitat and Distribution: Dry savannas, grasslands and coastal forests of West Africa

Size: Up to 9 inches long

Wild Diet: Vegetation, snails and insects such as beetles and millipedes.

Predators: Monitor lizards, raptors, hornbills and hyenas. Hyenas can bite through the shell of a hinge-back tortoise.

Life Span: 45-50 years

Reproduction: They lay 2-5 brittle-shelled eggs; hatchlings are 1 ½-2 in. long. The hatchlings don't have a hinge, but will develop one as they mature.

Behavior: Tortoises in this genus are the only tortoises with a hinge on the carapace. This allows them to withdraw their head further into their shell than most other tortoises and to close the rear of their shell over their back legs and tail. They seal the front of their shell with their front legs. Males are territorial and will battle intruders. One was once observed ramming a leopard tortoise twice its size hard enough to flip it over twice. During times of drought, they can burrow underground. They also have large anal sacs that store water that can be used during the dry season. This water may also be used by females used during the nesting season to help loosen and moisten the soil around the nest.

Conservation Connection: Currently listed as CITES Appendix II, meaning that they are not necessarily now threatened with extinction but that may become so unless trade is closely controlled. The major threat is the pet trade.

Interesting Facts: A current debate exists amongst scientists as to the number of species of hinge-back tortoises. The consensus is that there are 3 to 6 different species. Unlike the other hinge-back tortoises, *Kinixys belliana nogueyi* has four claws on each of its forefeet instead of five claws.

