

DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

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THE BOLSON TORTOISE, NORTH AMERICA'S LARGEST LAND REPTILE, LISTED AS ENDANGERED

The Bolson tortoise, the largest land reptile in North America, has been listed as an endangered species by the Interior Department's U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Acting Associate Director Harold J. O'Connor announced today.

The listing was published in the April 17, 1979, Federal Register.

The Bolson tortoise lives primarily in grassland areas of the states of Chihuahua, Coahuila, and Durango in Mexico. Adults may grow quite large, with shells measuring up to 39 inches in length. In spite of its size, the Bolson tortoise is one of the least known reptiles in the Northern Hemisphere.

Several factors are contributing to the species' decline--chiefly hunting of it for food by local people and destruction of its habitat for agriculture. The Bolson tortoise also has been in demand by zoos, museums, and private collectors.

Listing the tortoise as endangered strictly limits the purposes for which it may be imported into the United States. It also opens the way for the United States and Mexico to develop cooperative conservation programs for the tortoise.

The tortoise also is protected by a 51-country treaty, the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora. Delegates to a recent meeting of the Convention voted to upgrade it to Appendix I status, which would further limit the purposes for which it could be imported into any member country.

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