

# Gopher Tortoise

## *Gopherus polyphemus*

### Description

- A medium-sized tortoise with a dark brown to gray colored shell with some yellowish undertones. Juveniles are lighter brown with prominent yellow to orange markings until about 1 year of age.
- Adults can reach up to 15 inches in length.

### Habitat

- Gopher tortoises are the only native tortoise to Florida and found east of the Mississippi River.
- Found in variety of scrubby and dry habitats, including longleaf pine, imperiled scrub, pine flatwoods, dry prairies and along coastal sand dune systems.

### Conservation

- Gopher tortoises are considered both a keystone and umbrella species.
  - Keystone species is an organism that their presence helps define an ecosystem. If they are removed, their absence can cause ecological collapse.
  - An umbrella species is an organism that when they are protected, it also protects all of the species that depend on them.



Image credit: FWC



Image credit: Lucy Conklin



Image credit: Loggerhead Marinelifelife Center