



# RAVENS ON THE RISE

Ravens are the largest members of the crow family. Renowned for their intelligence, they are associated in lore and legend with magic, mischief and darkness. In California's deserts, however, ravens are better known as a major threat to the imperilled desert tortoise.



In the early 1900s, ravens were rare in California's deserts, but with the arrival and growth of human populations, ravens now number in the tens of thousands. Booming desert communities have introduced new sources of food and water for ravens, including illegal dumps, landfills, unsecured trash receptacles, road kills, man-made ponds and irrigation systems. In addition to food and water, human growth provides ravens with plenty of places to nest, such as billboards, telephone poles, bridges and buildings.



Ravens present a significant threat to the survival of the desert tortoise, an ancient species already listed as threatened by the state of California and the federal government.



The Desert Managers Group (DMG) is a partnership of county, state and federal agencies working together to conserve and enhance the California desert for current and future generations.  
[www.dmg.gov](http://www.dmg.gov)



The Living Desert is a remarkable zoo and botanical garden representing the deserts of North America and Africa. Its mission is desert conservation through preservation, education and appreciation.



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# INVASION OF THE TORTOISE SNATCHERS





## DESERT TORTOISE IN DECLINE

The desert tortoise is long-lived and well adapted to its arid environment, but raven predation and other human-induced changes in the desert have landed this large and lumbering reptile on the federal list of threatened species.

The desert tortoise is the grand survivor of California's deserts, having roamed its landscape for thousands of years. To escape ground temperatures that can reach 140 degrees, tortoises spend most of their time underground in burrows. When they do emerge to eat or drink, clever ravens are waiting to make fast food of young tortoises whose shells are not yet hard enough to protect them.

The desert tortoise is in danger of extinction in California's deserts, and the exploding raven population, along with disease, habitat loss and off-road vehicle traffic is high on the list of reasons.



Ravens are now a major predator of vulnerable young desert tortoises.



THREATENED Large numbers of ravens equals large numbers of dead tortoises.



Dumps, like the one pictured above, support unnaturally high populations of ravens. These clever birds also prey on young desert tortoises, who's shells remain soft, pliable, and easy to puncture for the first five years of life.



## WHAT YOU CAN DO TO HELP REDUCE THE RAVEN INVASION

### • DON'T FEED THE RAVENS

- ✦ "Raven-proof" your trash. Stash it in containers with tightly secured lids and don't pull it out until collection day.
- ✦ Dumpsters are a top draw for ravens. Make sure they are closed and secured at all times.
- ✦ Don't litter. Fast-food wrappers and other trash with traces of food attract ravens.
- ✦ When picnicking, don't leave food out in the open. Store it in secured coolers or in your car.
- ✦ Don't deposit trash in unauthorized dumps.
- ✦ Encourage landfill managers to reduce raven attractants.

### • DON'T PROVIDE WATER FOR RAVENS

- ✦ Don't water your lawn to the point where it runs over the curb or fills in depressions.
- ✦ Water early in the morning when soil is most absorbent.
- ✦ Landscape with native, desert adapted plants that don't require heavy watering.

### • DON'T PROVIDE NESTING SITES FOR RAVENS

- ✦ Encourage power companies to inspect their lines for raven nests and remove any they find.
- ✦ Encourage billboard owners/companies to remove raven nests.

Work with your local and county governments to teach residents and businesses how to raven-proof trash and take other measures to reduce food and water sources, and nesting sites available to ravens.

Stay informed. For up-to-date information on desert tortoises, visit [www.livingdesert.org/education/tortoise](http://www.livingdesert.org/education/tortoise)

