

FOR YEARS ENVIRONMENTAL ACTIVIST BLAMED THE U-S ARMY FOR DWINDLING NUMBERS OF DESERT TORTOISE. BUT AFTER TEN YEARS OF STUDY THE ARMY SAYS THE ISSUE IS MORE COMPLEX THAN ANYONE THOUGHT. ENVIRONMENTAL CORRESPONDENT JAVIER HERNANDEZ HAS THE STORY.

JAVIER: SINCE THE EARLY 1990'S ENVIRONMENTAL ACTIVISTS BLAMED ARMY TRAINING FOR THE DWINDLING NUMBER OF DESERT TORTOISE. BUT RESULTS OF AN ARMY STUDY SAY SEVERAL FACTORS ARE IMPACTING THE TORTOISE.

“ONE OF THE MOST FUNDAMENTAL THREATS IS HABITAT FRAGMENTATION. THAT CAN BE BROUGHT ABOUT BY AGRICULTURE, MILITARY ACTIVITY, HIGHWAY DEVELOPMENT OR URBAN SPRAWL.”
DAVID MORAFKA, PROF. BIOLOGY, CSDH

ACCORDING TO THE STUDY, THE POPULATIONS OF LOS ANGELES AND LOS VEGAS ARE SLOWLY EXPANDING INTO THE DESERT -- EATING UP TORTOISE HABITAT. AND WITH MORE PEOPLE CAME MORE WASTE WHICH SUBSIDIZED THE DIETS OF DOGS, CATS, COYOTES AND RAVENS, ALL OF WHICH PREY ON THE TORTOISE.

“THEIR NUMBERS BUILD UP AND THEY PRAY ON TORTOISE BUT THEY DON'T DEPEND ON THE TORTOISE SO THEY CAN HUNT THEM TO EXTINCTION WITH OUT DROPPING THEIR OWN NUMBERS.” - DAVID MORAFKA

THE STUDY ALSO FOUND MANY TORTOISE FELL VICTIM TO AN UPPER RESPIRATORY TRACT DISEASE. THE FACT THAT HATCHLINGS HAVE LESS

THAN A THREE- PERCENT CHANCE OF MAKING IT TO ADULthood AND THAT IT TAKES 14 TO 20 YEARS BEFORE THE TORTOISE ARE ABLE TO REPRODUCE DOESN'T HELP NUMBERS EITHER BUT ONE WAY THE ARMY IS HELPING IS WITH STRICT TRAINING GUIDELINES.

“WHEN UNITS ARE DOWN RANGE AND THEY ENCOUNTER A DESERT TORTOISE, EVEN IF THEY'RE IN THE MIDDLE OF A BATTLE, THEY'LL STOP AND CALL ME TO GO MOVE THAT ANIMAL.”- MICKY QUILLMAN

QUILLMAN AND MARAFKA AGREE THAT THERE ARE LIMITS TO THE CONSTRAINTS YOU CAN PLACE ON EFFECTIVE MILITARY TRAINING SO THAT THE ACCIDENTAL KILLING OF A TORTOISE HAS TO BE EXPECTED. BUT THEY ADD THAT THE TORTOISE CAN BENEFIT FROM THE ARMY'S PRESENCE.

“LAND, REDUCING SUBSIDIZED PREDATION, AND BREAKING THE DISEASE CYCLE ARE ALL AREA'S WHERE MILITARY CAN VERY EFFECTIVELY COMPENSATE FOR MODERATE LOSS OF HABITAT.” – MORAFKA

THE ARMY SET ASIDE 25 THOUSAND ACRES OF FORT IRWIN DEEMED CRITICAL TORTOISE HABITAT. NEXT FORT IRWIN OFFICIALS WILL INVESTIGATE SOLUTIONS TO THE OTHER PROBLEMS THREATENING THE DESERT TORTOISE , JAVIER HERNANDEZ, FORT IRWIN CALIFORNIA.