

AZGF department suggests wildlife-friendly ideas for spring

Instead of adopting a baby rabbit or chick, give back to nature

Special to the Review

Every Easter season, many parents adopt a baby rabbit, chick, or duck for their children, only to find the animals aren't the ideal family pet.

Arizona Game and Fish Department's Wildlife Center Coordinator Sandy Cate said instead of adding to the number of these animals that wind up in shelters each

year, the Arizona Game and Fish Department is suggesting some wonderful, wildlife-friendly and family-friendly ideas for this Spring.

"Easter is a time for parents and children to get together and celebrate life and nature," she said. "And there are many ways to celebrate without putting chicks and rabbits in homes that might not

be appropriate. Another problem involves families placing unwanted baby ducks, ill equipped to live in the wild, into random ponds in Arizona."

Cate said among the other Easter gift ideas to consider are adopting or sponsoring a desert tortoise.

California, Nevada, Utah, and northwestern Arizona recognize these tortoises as a threatened species. The tortoises can live longer than most people, up to 100 years and are legal to have at a private home, if you go through an application process with the Arizona Game and Fish Department.

"If you want to adopt an animal for Easter, a desert tortoise might be the right way to go," said Cate. "We have a careful process in place to make sure that all families who adopt one are really ready to handle one, including having a suitable burrow."

Cate also said a person can sponsor a tortoise in the name of a friend or loved one to help support desert tortoise research.

AZGF officials said these sponsorships help biologists ensure these creatures' survival for generations to come.

"We'll send each person who donates to the department's Sponsor-a-Tortoise Program a color photo of their 'adopted' tortoise," says Clayton Lutz, an Arizona Game and Fish Department biologist. "If someone donates \$50 or more, he or she will receive a tortoise project summary at the end of the year.

Lutz said contributors of more than \$100 will receive a profile of their sponsored tortoise for that year."

Anyone interested in sponsoring a tortoise is encouraged to call Clayton Lutz at (602) 789-3504.

AZGF officials also said anyone wanting to enjoy animals and nature together can buy some relatively inexpensive gifts to use in the outdoors. For example, a family can purchase seeds to plant a native shrub or tree in the backyard together. AZGF officials also suggested the purchase a pair of binoculars and a basic field guide for bird watching, such as "Birds of Arizona Field



Courtesy Photo

The Arizona Game and Fish Department encourages the public to help conservation efforts by 'adopting' a desert tortoise like this one.

Guide" by Stan Tekiela or "Bird Nests and Eggs" by Pinau Merlin. AZGF officials said the guides are suitable for both teens and adults.

Other wildlife-friendly books for kids include "Look Who Lives in the Desert!" from the people at "Arizona Highways" and "Correctamundo! Prickly Pete's Guide to Desert Facts and Cactifracts" from author David Lazaroff and the Arizona-Sonora Desert Museum.

AZGF Public Information Officer Debbie Freeman said Arizona families

can also enjoy some time in the outdoors fishing.

"Our recent rain has raised lake levels high, creating great fishing conditions," she said.

A general fishing license good for one year, costs just \$18. Those wanting to fish in Urban Fishing Program lakes in the metro Phoenix or Tucson area must purchase an urban fishing license at \$16.

Licenses are available at any Arizona Game and Fish Department office, many sporting goods stores, Wal-Marts or online at azgfd.gov.