

# Rooipensskilpad

## Angulate Tortoise

*Chersina angulata*

### About Angulates

The tortoise regularly seen on the Cape Agulhas roads is the Rooipens, Angulate Tortoise, *Chersina angulata* and an endemic species to the Southernmost Tip of Africa. The Angulate was identified in 1831 and known from a single living species.



### Origin of names

They are unique among African tortoises in having an undivided gular at the front of the plastron, which led to the Afrikaans name *Ploegskaarskilpad*. The scientific name derives from the Greek word *chersinos* which means land tortoise. The English name comes from the Latin word *angulus* which means angle or corner and refers to the elongate gular scute that projects forward beneath the head of adult males. The abdominals are light orange to red, varying seasonally, and possibly linked to a diet rich in carotene; hence the Afrikaans name *Rooipensskilpad*.



### Breeding

The female lays within three days after rainfall a single hard-shelled egg, seldom two. Incubation takes 90 to 200 days. In dry periods, eggs may be retained for up to 212 days before being laid. Females prepare a new egg for development immediately after nesting and may lay an egg up to six times a year. This behaviour might be interplay between predation and reproductive behaviour. High nest predation causes females to have a protracted breeding season.



### Predators

Natural predators are mongoose, jackal, baboons and predatory birds (such as crows) which attack the hatchlings. But, a man-induced threat is "road kill" - many tortoises are killed by speeding vehicles on roads. Motorists should be aware of tortoises crossing the roads; they are especially visible before rainy weather.



### Skilpadbessie, *Nylandtia spinosa*

The pink to purple flowers produce red fleshy fruit during summer, widely eaten by tortoises

(SOURCE: BRANCH, B. 2008. *Tortoises, terrapins and turtles of Africa*. Cape Town: Struik.)