Aldabra giant tortoise numbers hit record

LEVEL B1


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I. WARM-UP

1. What wildlife success stories do you know?
2. How can people help endangered animals recover?
3. What comes to mind when you hear "island"?

II. KEY VOCABULARY

survey
a study that collects information by counting or asking questions

estimate
a number that is close to the real amount, not exact

population
the total number of animals or people in one place

atoll
a ring-shaped island of coral around a lagoon

conservation
work to protect nature and wildlife

reserve
a protected area where nature is kept safe

drought
a long period with little or no rain

invasive
describing a species that enters and harms a local ecosystem

III. READING

Scientists say Aldabra Atoll in Seychelles holds about 180,000 giant tortoises, the largest free-roaming population. The estimate comes from a survey led by the Seychelles Islands Foundation and the University of Exeter, analysing counts from 2018 to 2022.

It is the first update since the late 1990s, when 100,000 were reported. The study, published in Ecology and Evolution, found the population stable, with almost 183,000 adults and sub-adults. The recovery follows decades of conservation work.

Aldabra was made a strict nature reserve in 1981 and a UNESCO site in 1982, after 19th-century hunting cut numbers to under 1,000. Today, Aldabra and the Galápagos are the only places where giant tortoises live in the wild. Success brings new work.

Shade and food are threatened as longer droughts are predicted and sea levels rise. Invasive mammals, such as feral cats and black rats, prey on eggs and hatchlings, so eradication is planned to protect growth.

Reading text adapted from reporting by **The Guardian***: "Scientists discover 180,000 giant tortoises...". Original article linked at theenglishwire.com.*

IV. COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

1. Where is the world's largest free-roaming giant tortoise population?
2. About how many tortoises live on Aldabra, according to the estimate?
3. Who led the survey that produced the new figure?
4. What protections were given to Aldabra in 1981 and 1982?
5. What future threats to the tortoises does the study mention?

V. DISCUSSION

1. Why is Aldabra's recovery called a success story?
2. How could similar conservation help other species?
3. Should invasive animals be removed to protect wildlife? Why?
4. What climate risks might islands face in coming decades?

VI. GRAMMAR FOCUS

Passive voice

We use the passive to focus on the thing affected, especially when the doer is unknown or less important. Form: be + past participle (is/are/was/were + verb-3).

"Aldabra **was made** *a strict nature reserve in 1981."*

"Shade and food **are threatened** *as longer droughts are predicted."*

VII. GRAMMAR EXERCISE

Complete the sentences with the correct passive form.

1. Counts (analyse) ___ from 2018 to 2022. _____
2. About 100,000 tortoises (report) ___ in the late 1990s. _____
3. Eggs and hatchlings (eat) ___ often by invasive mammals. _____
4. Aldabra (list) ___ by UNESCO in 1982. _____
5. Eradication (plan) ___ to protect growth. _____

Teacher's Notes

TEACHERS ONLY

These notes are designed to help you get the most out of this lesson. Please do not share this page with students.


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I. LESSON GUIDE

- Timing: 8–10 minutes warm-up, 10 minutes vocabulary, 12–15 minutes reading and comprehension, 8–10 minutes grammar, 12–15 minutes discussion.
- Pre-teach or check: atoll, reserve, estimate, invasive, drought. Show a map of Seychelles and a photo of a giant tortoise to set context.
- Reading procedure: students skim for the key number (about 180,000), then scan for when counts were made and who led the survey. Pair-check before open class.
- Differentiation: stronger students summarise the recovery timeline; others match each threat to what it harms (droughts and rising seas/shade and food; invasive mammals/eggs and hatchlings).

II. DISCUSSION FACILITATION TIPS

1. Elicit key milestones (under 1,000 in 19th century, protections in 1981–82, stable now). Ask for one reason it worked.
2. Have students name a species, then apply steps from the text: survey, protect a reserve, control threats.
3. Run a quick show of hands, then pair opposite views to swap reasons and find one shared principle.
4. Board ideas from the text (droughts, sea levels) and add local examples. Push for one concrete effect on wildlife.

III. EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

Writing: In pairs, write a 70-word update for a park noticeboard about Aldabra's success and next steps.

Presentation: In groups, design a 2-minute plan to protect a local species using ideas from Aldabra's recovery.

IV. ANSWER KEY OVERVIEW

Comprehension questions: short factual answers from the text.

Grammar exercise: Passive voice

Discussion: open-ended. Accept any reasonable ideas supported by examples and reasoning.

Answer Key

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IV. COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

1. Where is the world's largest free-roaming giant tortoise population?
   On Aldabra Atoll in Seychelles.
2. About how many tortoises live on Aldabra, according to the estimate?
   About 180,000.
3. Who led the survey that produced the new figure?
   The Seychelles Islands Foundation and the University of Exeter.
4. What protections were given to Aldabra in 1981 and 1982?
   It became a strict nature reserve in 1981 and a UNESCO site in 1982.
5. What future threats to the tortoises does the study mention?
   Longer droughts, rising sea levels, and invasive mammals like cats and rats.

V. DISCUSSION

Open answers. Accept any reasonable ideas supported by examples and reasoning.

VI. GRAMMAR FOCUS

Key point: We use the passive to focus on the thing affected, especially when the doer is unknown or less important. Form: be + past participle (is/are/was/were + verb-3).

> *"Aldabra* **was made** *a strict nature reserve in 1981."*
>
> *"Shade and food* **are threatened** *as longer droughts are predicted."*

VII. GRAMMAR EXERCISE

Complete the sentences with the correct passive form.

1. Counts ___ from 2018 to 2022. **were analysed**
2. About 100,000 tortoises ___ in the late 1990s. **were reported**
3. Eggs and hatchlings ___ often by invasive mammals. **are eaten**
4. Aldabra ___ by UNESCO in 1982. **was listed**
5. Eradication ___ to protect growth. **is planned**