



newsletter

Improving the lives of wild and desert tortoises through education. A non-profit organization since 1982

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A non-profit organization since 1982

Hotline: 702-739-7113
www.TortoiseGroup.org

June Speaker Captivates Tortoise Group

Notes by Betty Burge

Veterinarian, Dr. Christine Kolmstetter of Cheyenne West Animal Hospital, spoke to Tortoise Group on Sunday June 14. If you were unable to attend, you missed a very informative and interesting talk on parasites. Here are some points to keep in mind.

The parasite problem for tortoises locally is not so much external parasites, but rather intestinal parasites, although blood parasites may be a problem.

Examination: Dr. Kolmstetter recommended an annual exam and not just for intestinal parasites. Parasites may be only part of an unseen problem. Dr. Kolmstetter suggests a whole body exam as well as examining a fecal sample, certainly if a new tortoise that is to be brought into your yard and especially if there are other tortoises in your yard. If so, you will want to keep the new one separated from others until their health and parasite status is known and, if necessary, treated. Sometimes a low parasite "load" does not warrant treatment. Treating the tortoise until there are "no apparent parasites" may do more harm than good. Find out if your vet

wants you to make an appointment so the tortoise can be examined as well as the fecal sample (scat). The debilitating results of a heavy load of parasites may have a considerable effect upon the resistance of the tortoise to other medical problems.

Sample Collection: Collect the freshest scat you can. You may find a plastic spoon helps or a small plastic bag with zip closure. Save it in a zip closing bag and keep cool. Do not freeze. Keep moist using a damp paper towel. Double bag if you are using the refrigerator for cooling. Label the container or plastic bag with your full name, phone number, the tortoise's name and species, and the date of collection. If the sample is a group sample include that.



If you have more than one tortoise and you do not know which tortoise produced the scat, collect several-- a group sample. If any one of the tortoises has sufficient parasites to warrant treatment, all the tortoises are at risk for being or becoming infested.

The doctor will be looking for parasite eggs (ova) that are microscopic. If the load of ova is low the doctor may choose not to treat. Most tortoises in the wild will live normally with a low load. However, in your yard the chance of infesting others is high. In your yard tortoises live close together. Therefore, it is much more likely for an infestation to become worse than in the desert where tortoises

New T-Shirts Arrived!

Soon tortoise enthusiasts will be wearing Tortoise Group's beautiful chocolate brown t-shirt with the new logo embroidered in tan. Available in men's and women's styles, these handsome shirts can be purchased both at meetings and at the OnLine Store. Thank you, Jessica Carroll, who facilitated this project.

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June Speaker Captivates Tortoise Group

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are spread out. There is much less chance of eating vegetation on which a fresh scat has been dropped with its live eggs and, unlike our yards, moist patches are rare. When the ova dry they die.

Treatment: Treatment involves one of several liquid medications administered orally. It may be followed by a second fecal exam and possibly a second dose. Do not let a veterinarian use *Invermectin* for your tortoise. It may be effective and safe for other animals but in tortoises can cause irreversible neurological complications.

Infestation: The parasites that typically infest tortoises have a direct life cycle, that is, from tortoise to tortoise via ingesting the ova of the parasites. The scats are passed out on grass or other tortoise food item. Then the tortoise ingests some bits of scat and ova inadvertently and the tortoise has parasites again. The ova of some parasites require that they pass through one or more other species, such as insects or water creatures, before they can reinfest the original species again. That is an indirect life cycle.

One way to prevent reinfestation is to pick up scats as soon as possible after they are dropped, especially on the lawn or other damp places and near food items. Certainly damp grass will keep the ova alive longer and they may be washed down among the blades of grass during irrigation

unless the scat has been removed. Discard the scats. Do not compost them.

Hatchlings and Scats: You may have heard that hatchlings derive benefit from eating the scats of adults. The transfer of certain organisms aids with digestion and enhances the utilization of food eaten by the hatchlings and their development. It would be a very good if your hatchlings have a chance to nibble on adult scats. But first be sure to have all your older tortoises checked for intestinal parasites.

Transfer of Disease: It is best to prevent your tortoises, dogs, and cats from eating one another's scats even though intestinal parasites are usually species specific (affect only given species). What can be transferred from dogs to humans is Giardia, a protozoan (a microscopic animal). What can be transferred from tortoises to humans is Salmonella, a bacterium. It is wise to assume that any reptile is probably carrying Salmonella; wash your hands accordingly, certainly before you eat or handle food after touching a tortoise. However, a very young child crawling on the grass or touching the tortoise unseen by you can be a problem because the very young tend to put their fingers in their mouths often. This is something to think about before getting a tortoise if you have very young children. Wait until they are old enough to understand.

Clever Design, Clever Tortoise!

by Mark Melton

This will be Pekai's (Péek eye) sixth summer with us. One of the first things she learned was that the giant, heat-wasting, water-wasting, totally hyper but slow-learning characters who owned the huge burrow near hers, kept amenities like MegaDiet, desert willow flowers, and dandelion greens, and also a very suitable alternative burrow under the guest room bed. To get

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Pekai looks hopefully into the house after stepping on the doorbell ringer.

Question Corner by Betty Burge

Q. At our local vet's office I picked up your publication concerning desert tortoises. It stated that Miracle-Gro fertilizer was safe to use in a yard with a desert tortoise. I had never heard this before. Do you know if it is safe?

A. Miracle-Gro is applied in liquid form and can quickly be watered well into the ground. Pelletized and granular fertilizers dissolve slowly. They stay in the grass and can be eaten by tortoises, causing harm.

Why fertilize? My tortoise ignores my grass and even the dandelions when the watering has left the soil drained of nutrients the tortoise needs and can determine by taste. As soon as I fertilize with liquefied Miracle-Gro, the tortoise eats the lawn with renewed interest.

Q. I purchased some MegaDiet for our 5-year-old tortoise. Trek took very quickly to the MegaDiet, but I just have to wonder if he/she is getting enough. I give it the amount recommended on the MegaDiet package, but it seems to crave more. Should I make more and just let it eat to its heart content? Trek loves desert willow flower too!

A. The amounts listed on the package are suggested or minimum amounts. Feed a tortoise as much MegaDiet as it wants. Since Trek is new to MegaDiet, it may be "catching up" if it has been eating a diet that does not have all the nutrients the tortoise needs. If so, Trek may slow down, eventually.



Trek eats MegaDiet pellets with some difficulty from this slippery, flat surface.



A shallow bowl FULL of MegaDiet pellets would allow Trek to take a mouthfull of food easily.

Q. Last week a lady I work with told me about someone who wants to give away lots of young tortoises. Is there a facility where unwanted tortoise can be placed?

A. If you live in Clark County, Nevada, call the Tortoise Pick-up Service, 702-593-9027. They will arrange a time to come for the tortoises and take them to the Desert Tortoise Conservation Center (DTCC) where they will be cared for. The DTCC takes unwanted tortoises, tortoises found wandering loose in neighborhoods, or tortoises one must give up because one is moving out of state. In the meantime, Tortoise Group will be working to help other caring folks to prepare for adoption. Call us if you have additional questions and please spread the word about the place your extra tortoises can go.

Q. Are tortoises turned in to the DTCC euthanized? Several people think they are.

A. At our May meeting, Dr. Paula Kahn, director of the DTCC told us that tortoises will NOT be euthanized, even those that test positive for Upper Respiratory Disease Syndrome.

MegaDiet Satellite Sellers

Please call sellers for appointment

Nellis & Owens	Georgi – 459-1274
Decatur & Gowan	Toni – 277-6179
Cheyenne & Durango	Susann - 205-7576
215 & Far Hills	Kathy & Pauline – 804-0472, 9am – 7pm
215 & W. Tropicana	Athena- 891-8585
Rainbow & Alta	Kellie –353-5513
Dean Martin & Blue Diamond	Carolyn – 876-0668, ext. 874
Tropicana & Maryland	Betty – 739-8043
Eastern & Windmill	Patsy – 269-7108
Silverado Ranch & S. Maryland Pkwy	Helene – 878-7877
Boulder Hwy & Equestrian (Henderson)	Gail – 334-0015 Cell
Warm Springs & Lake Mead (Henderson)	Gay – 563-1924
Boulder City	Carol - 293-6494
Pahrump	Sheri –775-727-5557
Kingman, AZ	Toni – 928-757-8317

Henderson's Best Kept Secret

Henderson Bird Viewing Sanctuary, located within the Water Treatment Facility, sits on approximately 140 acres near the intersection of Sunset and Boulder Highway. Address is 2400 B Moser Drive, phone 267-4180. Open every day 6 am -3 pm, no charge. If you need binoculars they will hold your car keys "in trade." At least 260 species of birds have been viewed there. http://www.cityofhenderson.com/parks/parks/bird_preserve.php

MegaDiet Sellers Needed

- Camino al Norte & Ann Rd.
 - Charleston and Rancho
- Call Betty at 739-8043 for more info.

OnLine Store at: <http://www.tortoisegroup.org/sales/intoshop.php>

No computer? Don't use a credit card? Call Susan – 702-458-8382

A 1½ lb bag costing \$8.00 (\$12.00 for non-members) lasts a large desert tortoise about one month. MegaDiet is also sold at TG meetings.

Thanks MegaDiet Baggers!

May 30 brought another MegaDiet Bagging day to the Nevada State Museum. Forty-five wonderful folks signed in. With such a big group, the task finished in short order. Another ton of MegaDiet is out there ready for consumption

Toni Downen	Rich Dinkel	Steven Goldman	Carol Smith
Gail Collins-Ranadive	Ed and Pat Maestri	Susann Stoecklin	Georgi Shalhoob
Marilyn Cozad	Beverly Stewart	Diane Henry	Melissa Macias
Kathy Utiger	Jim Switalla	Derek and Andrew Tom	Dan Cloninger
Betty Burge	Mark Martin	Jessica and Chad	Jaene Graye
Trilla Newton	Lucy Martin	Carol Thompson	Tara Vose
Laura Deitsch	Bobbi Papadopulo	Vicki and Tony Ligotti	Gretchen Mau
Richard Knapp	Shari Westerlink	Stephanie Hodges	Ray and Thomas Lantz
Debbie Forbush	Kathleen Rice	Tom Collett	Jeff Neal
Pat Ashley	Jana Thompson	Susan Stater	Don Frisch

Two Ways to Prevent Heartache

Last week, I received this email from Dan Cloninger, Tortoise Group supporter extraordinaire: "Somebody left my back gate open and my tortoise walked off. I didn't even know he was gone! I received a phone call from a neighbor two blocks away and they found Harold walking down the sidewalk. Thanks to my phone number identification on the shell, we got Harold back."

This happy ending is the one we hope to hear more often about an escaped tortoise. Our simple marking technique can save you from the heartache of losing your tortoise. The Lost Tortoise Prevention Kit has all the equipment for marking several tortoises. Check the Online Store on our website.



Harold shows off his tortoise tag with Dan's phone number



The gate is open but the removable barrier prevents the tortoise from escaping.

But how about the gate that was left open? If a removable gate barrier is installed, even if the gate is left open the tortoise will not escape. You may wish to refer to page 7 of our Care Booklet.

Clever Design, Clever Tortoise!

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to these amenities she had to learn to negotiate a way through something called a "door." Unlike any decent burrow opening, these door-things were not always open. Learning to get through a door has been a long-term research project for our Pekai.

She tried climbing the door, but that sometimes resulted in falling backwards and winding up upside down. A real bummer! Then she discovered that just scratching with her claws on the aluminum threshold would sometimes result in the door being opened. The sound of tortoise claws on aluminum is not particularly pleasant, and in any case it was a hit-or-miss proposition.

When I found out that a wireless doorbell system could be purchased for less than \$20, a possible

solution occurred to me. Why not fix up the doorbell so a tortoise could step on it and cause it to ring? Detailed instructions can be found at <http://www.tortoisegroup.org/new/devices/doorbell.html>.

When completed, we put the box outside the patio door where Pekai likes to patrol. After a couple of days we had almost forgotten about it when about noon one day, the doorbell went off. At first we were panicked and thought it was a fire alarm. No it was just Pekai. She was sitting on the box and one foot had seemingly, inadvertently stepped down on the lever and set it off. We let her in and fed her. After that, she seemed to get the idea and before long became an outright nuisance, ringing the doorbell several times a day.

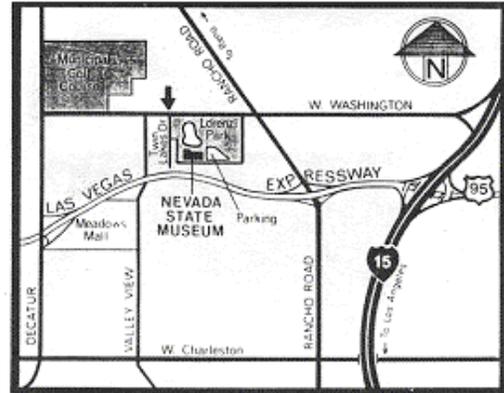
Summer Meeting Schedule

Nevada State Museum & Historical Society
700 Twin Lakes Drive (in Lorenzi Park) Las Vegas

Kids Day Calendar Creation July 18, Saturday 1 - 3 p.m.

Folk Storyteller, Angelina Yost, enthralls us with tales of tortoises

Your child is the STAR -- of our first-ever Tortoise Group calendar. We'll provide all the art supplies and credit. Your child provides the imagination and creativity. You supply the kids ages 5 to 18. Twelve pictures from a range of ages will grace Tortoise Group's 2010 calendar, containing monthly tips and ideas to care for tortoises.



Call Kathy at 804-0472 for directions

August 15, Saturday 1 - 3 p.m.

Update on the Clark County Desert Conservation Program
by biologists Karin Hoff, PhD and Ron Marlow, PhD

It's been more than 20 years since the Mojave Desert population of Desert Tortoises became listed as endangered by the US Fish and Wildlife Service. Come hear biologists Hoff and Marlow update us on their progress, speed bumps and future issues, including the regulatory actions taken to recover Desert Tortoise populations. New construction fees funded conservation actions to mitigate development. This talk examines the success and failure of those actions and the status of wild tortoise populations today. Come learn how you can stay abreast of the situation and take action to protect our precious desert dweller.

School Project Team Meets

Glenace Melton and Jerry Schupe have been working on a program for fourth graders at schools with tortoise habitats. Children will use the scientific method to learn about and record tortoise behavior. Now a team of volunteers has joined Glenace and Jerry to flesh out the program with activities and to develop a journal. The project will begin as a pilot

program this fall at one or two schools. Tortoise Group will provide a set of equipment for each learning unit and a journal for each child. The volunteers include Tonya May, Nancy Crenshaw, Ann Fellows, Kate Sorom, Laura Brinson, Susan Stater, Karyn Johnson, and Georgi Shalhoob.

Facts about Owning a Sulcata Tortoise

by Betty Burge

Sulcata or Spurred Tortoises, *Geochelone sulcata*, live in central Africa. Temperatures throughout their locations range from lows of 50-63 to highs of 86 to 109 degrees F - neither as cold nor as hot as throughout our desert tortoise's range. Rainfall ranges from 2-4 inches to 8-12 inches.

Do not adopt a sulcata unless you are willing to provide for a tortoise that gets to be 2 ½ feet long and weighs 200 pounds! They have special needs, such as.....

- Heated housing. Sulcatas are active year round. This shelter eventually must be large enough for the full grown adults, a place where they can move about, eat, sleep, and drink without going outside when temperatures outside are cool to cold. A pet door may save you making the decision of exactly when to allow them outside in early spring and late summer when mornings and nights are too cold for them to spend outdoors.
- Protection from our extreme heat. Sulcatas can dig but in our local soils be prepared to dig the underground burrow
- A large enclosure, separate from and larger than what you provide for your desert tortoise. The area of a large back yard may not be large enough. Sulcatas will ram the walls and knock over items in the yard. These problems may start when the tortoise is about 30 pounds, and by the time they are 80 pounds this behavior can be intolerable. Too small an area and lack of enough of the right food can aggravate this behavior and be stressful to the tortoise as well as to you.
- A high fiber diet that includes Timothy grass, alfalfa hay, and common Bermuda grass. Grocery store greens will not provide enough fiber or a complete diet. MegaDiet, that Tortoise Group sells, helps with the needed fiber and has the basic nutrients needed including trace elements that you cannot provide with just grocery store vegetables. Runny scats (fecal droppings) can be a sign of insufficient fiber. You can grow white clover and alfalfa, an assortment of ornamental flowers but no sweet fruit. These tortoises, like our desert tortoise, may eat small stones, bits of glass, bone, foil, and colored paper, fur, feathers and balloon fragments, so keep the yard litter-free.

What will you do when that adorable little tortoise is mowing down the trees in your yard and is just plain too big?? Who will take your sulcata? We have been offered six so far this season. Pet stores often sell sulcatas to unwary customers without providing proper information. A totally irresponsible action on their part but does not have to be on your part.

Tortoise Group Membership Form		
Memberships and contributions may be tax deductible		
1. Please Print the COMPLETE address		
First Name _____	Last Name _____	Phone _____
Address _____		
City _____	State _____	Zip Code _____
E-mail _____		
2. Check One Newsletter Option 2009		
<input type="checkbox"/> Send my newsletter by e-mail		
<input type="checkbox"/> Send my newsletter in hard copy		
3. Check amount for your 1-year membership		
<input type="checkbox"/> \$15 <input type="checkbox"/> \$25 <input type="checkbox"/> \$35 <input type="checkbox"/> \$50 <input type="checkbox"/> \$75 <input type="checkbox"/> Life \$500		
Special Project Funding		
Contribution: _____		TOTAL _____
33% discount on MegaDiet and 10% on other Tortoise Group goodies to members and their immediate families		
Make check payable to Tortoise Group. Mail with form to:		
Tortoise Group ♦ 1001 Adobe Flat ♦ Henderson, NV 89011		

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