



# TORTOISE GROUP NEWS

VOLUME XXX NO.5 APRIL 2017

## Getting Ready for Spring!

Tortoise Group is committed to being and staying green by publishing only electronic versions of the newsletter.

All newsletters, including past editions, can be found at [TortoiseGroup.Org](http://TortoiseGroup.Org)

You can also register to receive email updates on our website or by emailing: [help@tortoisegroup.org](mailto:help@tortoisegroup.org)

*Thank you for helping us keep our planet healthy!*

Kobbe Shaw, Executive Director

## Thank you to our Community Partners



Thank you to our community partners for all your help and support.  
We appreciate you!

## THE TORT REPORT

### Spring Activities for the Custodian

If you are like us, your tortoise always emerges before your yard is cleaned up for spring. Then there's a big rush to remove all the tortoise traps and make the yard safe for the shelly one. Our windy weather always brings in litter. Little bits of foil and plastic attract the tortoise since they can be brightly colored like flowers. Be sure to pick up even the tiny bits in this first spring cleanup and then after each big wind. Look around your yard with an eye to new tortoise hazards. If your tortoise is growing, think about new places for it to get stuck. Keep leaves and grasses from blowing into the burrow.

Keep records! Mark down the date your tortoise came out of brumation. Record the weight and measure the length of the shell several times during the season.

Inspect your tortoise! See if the nostrils are runny or bubbly (slight whistling sound may be normal). Check that the eyes are clear and not watery, crusty, or swollen. Look over the shell for any changes. Check the limbs for signs of injury.

Soak Your Tortoise! Your tortoise will have lost precious water over the winter. When your tortoise has basked and is warm, soak it in lukewarm water.

Clever folks in Tortoise Group report having video recorded tortoise doings in the burrow by fastening the cell phone to a selfie stick. They turn on the video and slide the pole down the burrow. Using a mirror reflecting sunlight into the burrow is the best daytime method.

### What happens when your desert tortoise passes away?

Scientists and biologist across the southwest continue to study information concerning tortoises; there is a need for recently deceased tortoises for scientific purposes. If this unfortunate event happens to you and your family, please consider the simple gift that will help scientists and the general public for years to come. For more info, please contact Kobbe Shaw at [kobbeshaw@tortoisegroup.org](mailto:kobbeshaw@tortoisegroup.org)



# Tortoises Enjoy Glorious Life in Prison.

At just this time 20 years ago, Betty Burge (Tortoise Group's founder) created a habitat and introduced the first tortoise at the Florence McClure Women's Correctional Center (FMWCC) at I-15 and Lamb Road. What better place for a tortoise than where women could learn all about tortoise care and lavish their attention on a beautiful tortoise? Much to everyone's surprise, the female tortoise produced seven hatchlings! Over the years, a number of tortoises have lived at FMWCC. The FMWCC habitat is a tortoise paradise lovingly groomed by its several caretakers.

The current residents are, in order of seniority.  
Pebbles - long-time resident about 70 years old,  
Ruby - an adult three-year resident who was abused by another female at her home  
Ava - a younger adult who asked for a new home after a Sterilization Clinic.

None of the girls are able to live with one another without fighting, so the long habitat is divided into three sections. After one of many improvements, each girl now has a snug aboveground burrow. The prison staff chooses the tortoise caretakers with several factors in mind. Since really understanding tortoises and gaining the knowledge to care for a tortoise requires years to acquire, responsible, longer-term inmates are selected. Over the years, at least 40 inmates have cared for tortoises and helped build new features.

In fact, women on one side of a whole building overlooking the habitat immediately send out the alarm if Ruby, the flipping-over girl, is in danger. A caretaker then races to the rescue. One inmate shared with me that taking care of the tortoises gives her life meaning. Being responsible for their health and diet gives her joy. Walking into the habitat brings peace while its beauty restores her to a mental health difficult to achieve when facing a lifetime in prison.

She asked me to include this astounding fact: of the 40 plus caretakers over the years, only two have returned to prison! Obviously, taking care of tortoises has a very positive effect. A volunteer for Tortoise Group at the prison needs a thorough knowledge of tortoise health and behavior as well as habitat plant and building techniques. The Nevada Department of Corrections requires a 2-step TB test (1-step annually) and a training that is repeated every three years. The visits are coordinated with a prison staff person who escorts the volunteers.

Therefore, this wonderful task belongs in the long-term category for anyone interested. Tortoise Group supplies the materials, plants, and food for the habitat. What a pleasure it is to know that three magnificent tortoises enjoy exceptional loving care and that the tortoises, in turn, provide a support and meaning for their caretakers that is beyond measure.

Author - Kathy Utiger

## Tortoise Food Satellite Sellers

**Is your tortoise hungry?**  
**Please contact sellers directly to pick up Tortoise Food. TG Members receive a discount and a percentage of each sale benefits Tortoise Group.**  
**Thank you for caring for your tortoise and supporting the efforts of Tortoise Group.**

Nellis & Owens.....	Georgi (702)459-1274
Durango & Grand Teton.....	Cathy (702)339-5012
Craig & Cimmaron.....	Annie (702)306-5096
Decatur & Gowan.....	Toni (702)277-6179
Rainbow & Charleston.....	Jamie (702)232-6289
Charleston & Casino Center.....	Trilla (702)528-2237
2-15 & WTropicana.....	Athena (702)682-0307
2-15 & S Decatur.....	Carolyn (702)378-6514
2-15 & Windmill.....	Diana (801)510-3526
Russell & Pecos.....	Sherri (702)339-9821
Lake Mead & Van Wagenen.....	Peggy (702)281-3048
Boulder City.....	Carol (702)293-6494
Sparks.....	Kym (775)762-3418
S. Reno.....	Tonya (775)813-0050
Gardnerville.....	Tricia (775)450-2259

You can also shop at our online store  
24/7  
-  
[tortoisegroup.org](http://tortoisegroup.org)

Business Locations  
(Member pricing not available - tax added to price)

Boca Park Animal Hospital  
Charleston & Rampart.....(702)675-7000

Creature Comforts Animal Hospital  
Ann Rd & US-95.....(702)658-7339

Lone Mountain Animal Hospital  
Rainbow & US-95.....(702)645-3116

Aloha Animal Hospital  
S Torrey Pines & Warm Springs.....(702)567-5222

**Remember to soften your tortoise food with warm water until it is a juicy mash. Do not feed them dry pellets. Form it into a wedge for easy biting! Yuuummmmy!!!**





# ADOPTION AND BURROW BUILDING BY VOLUNTEERS



From the first yard consultation, helping a family build the forever home for their soon to be adopted tortoise is full of excitement. The volunteers who work with Sarah Mortimer, the Adoption Coordinator, evaluate the yard of prospective adopters and offer suggestions for safety and plantings that the tortoise will like to eat.

If the family agrees to any changes and would like help with building their burrow, Sarah schedules the burrow build, advises the family what to purchase, and our volunteers arrive to help build the new home for the tortoise. When the prospective tortoise comes out of brumation, it is brought to its new family.

With a commitment of 20 burrows to be built prior to the tortoises emerging this spring, we often are building 2-3 burrows per weekend. Generally we have 4 volunteers to shovel/ wheelbarrow the chat from the street to the new burrow location and cover the frame. Often times we can use materials found on the property to make the entrance cozy and secure. An hour after we arrive the burrow is complete and ready for its new occupant.

If you are interested in learning more about joining the burrow building volunteer team or you already know that you wish to volunteer, please call Sarah Mortimer at 702-970-9806 or email her at: [sarahmortimer@tortoisegroup.org](mailto:sarahmortimer@tortoisegroup.org).

Author - Jeff Zeigler



## TORTOISE GROUP HOTLINE

What's the most important thing when you have a question concerning your tortoise?

You want a human being that actually answers the phone when you call. Being the lifeline to someone in need, whether the question is just where to find food, what do desert tortoises eat, how can I make a burrow correctly or where can I find a veterinarian for my tortoise makes this a rewarding volunteer job. Other questions we sometimes get run from why hasn't he come out yet, I found a tortoise, I want to adopt a tortoise or, sadly, I cannot care for my tortoise anymore.

This position is very easy to do. All we ask is for you to give one week a month to answering the hot line, Sunday through Saturday, minimum business hours, or longer if you can. It is fun to get to know other tortoise lovers like yourself and you really can calm the fears of most of the callers. You can use your own phone and answer from anywhere. If you know you may not be able to answer during a certain period of time, you have a recorded message and you call the caller back as soon as possible. Of course, once in a while there are issues that come up that only Kobbe or Sarah can solve, so, you explain to the caller that someone will get back to them. And you notify Kobbe or Sarah of the issue. And sometimes it is as easy as referring them to our fantastic website.

You won't be bored for sure. One of my favorite calls was when a lady was out walking in the desert with her dog and the dog found a small tortoise. The dog bit the shell and put a hole in it. The woman was so upset that she brought the tortoise home and called us asking what to do. We picked it up from her and took it to a vet and then fostered it for two weeks until the antibiotics worked. After the tortoise was healed, we put it right back where that woman found it as she was able to give us accurate GPS coordinance. We took photos of the release and forwarded them to her as she was extremely concerned about the little guy.

We always need more volunteers to staff the Hotline. Please consider volunteering. You will have a great time, I guarantee it!

If you would like to help out, please email our Volunteer Coordinator: [diannemclain@tortoisegroup.org](mailto:diannemclain@tortoisegroup.org).

## NEWS FROM THE SATELITE SELLERS

Being a satellite seller for Tortoise Group is a fun way to volunteer your time. All you need to do is have the tortoise feed on hand and when tortoise owners call, you arrange for the buyer to meet you to purchase and pick up the food. At the end of the month, if you had any sales, you send your completed sales form with a check for the amount of your sales to Kobbe.

I have found this to be a fantastic way to meet other tortoise lovers and to share experiences with others about your favorite pets ever. Satellite sellers live all over the valley so it is a very convenient way for people to purchase food in their area. It is so easy to call a seller and just arrange a convenient time for pick up.

The easiest way to find a satellite seller is to go onto our website to locate a seller near you and give them a call!

## LOST AND FOUND

Unfortunately, sometimes our four-legged friends lose their way. Please check [tortoisegroup.org](http://tortoisegroup.org) to help these tortoises find their way home.



Harvey was lost near the Westcliff/Buffalo area in Las Vegas, NV



# MASTER CLASS FOR VOLUNTEERS

On Sunday March 5th, Tortoise Group held its second Volunteer Master Training Workshop. Over 50 people attended this event during which they learned or reviewed basic facts about the Mojave Desert Tortoise. Kobbe Shaw, our Executive Director, gave the opening welcome before introducing our adoption coordinator, Sarah Mortimer. Sarah presented the background information on *Gopherus Agassizii* so that all of our volunteers can be at the same level of understanding for tortoise outreach and education. Kobbe ended the presentation with information on the opportunities that we will have in conjunction with various government agencies for Wild Conservation.

After the presentation, the attendees had the opportunity to find out more information on the various activities Tortoise Group will be involved in this year. They were able to have one-on-one discussions with volunteers who regularly participate in our volunteer events and activities. These activities include adoption, yard consults and burrow building which have been an on-going operation over the winter months. Other areas that utilize volunteers include the Emergency Habitat, Satellite Food sales, Hotline, Newsletter design and content, and Education and Outreach. We have already made an appearance at the Las Vegas Pet Expo in February and met some locals who are interested in our group and its activities.

Coming up April 1st is a great opportunity for tortoise outreach at the Spring Mountain Ranch, called Spring Fling. April 8th is another family and pet expo at Downtown Summerlin, then the GreenFest at Downtown Summerlin on April 22. Following those events is the Las Vegas Science Expo on May 5th. As you can see, there are lots of opportunities for TG members to represent our organization and answer questions from the public about tortoise care and adoption and Tortoise Group.

Another opportunity this year is Tortoise Facts and Q&A at the Springs Preserve a number of Saturdays in March, April and May. It is a simple presentation about tortoises to people who are visiting the Springs Preserve, with the added opportunity to have a live tortoise for "show and tell". This is an easy way to represent Tortoise Group with not too much time involvement, and the opportunity to visit the Springs Preserve.

Last, but not least, are our two Wellness Clinics and our Sterilization Clinic. Both have been highly successful and appreciated by Las Vegas tortoise owners in the past couple of years. As you can imagine, they are both highly dependent upon volunteers from our wonderful group of Tortoise Group members. There are numerous opportunities to help out at these clinics from Registration and Intake to hands-on care.

If you were unable to attend the Master Training Workshop and would still like to help out our organization, please drop me an email or call me to discuss how you would like to fit in. We have opportunities to fit everyone's interest and abilities. Looking forward to meeting you all this year!

Author - Dianne McLain



Golden Tortoise Society Members  
can be assured their beloved desert tortoise pet will be cared for  
and adopted to a loving home following the custodian's death if no person is  
designated or able to provide their care. Contact [info@tortoisegroup.org](mailto:info@tortoisegroup.org)  
for a free consultation with a local estate planning attorney.



# WHAT TO EXPECT EACH SEASON FROM YOUR DESERT TORTOISE



As you anxiously wait to see your tortoise emerge from brumation, check your yard for debris and hazards. Plant some new flowers or desert plants. Remember to weigh your tortoise when they emerge and mark down the date of emergence. When they are awake and active, offer water for a soak. Let them tell you when they are ready to eat. After you notice they have started browsing on their own, it's time to offer tortoise chow!



You're probably noticing that your tortoise comes out earlier in the morning or later in the evening. Sometimes, your tortoise may even sleep in. It takes a lot of energy to stay cool, so your tortoise may not be as active. It's time to weigh and measure your tortoise and remember to give them weekly soaks to stay hydrated. Check your gate barriers to make sure your tortoise is safe.



As the weather cools, your tortoise may not be as interested in food. Continue to soak your tortoise. Check nurseries for plant sales. This is a great time to get some new plants established - when your tortoise won't be eating them up! Make sure your burrow is snug and safe. A snug burrow will keep your tortoise insulated all winter long. Males may be active during this time, so make sure your yard is secure and safe.



Northern Nevada tortoises will be snuggled in their containers in garages while Southern Nevada tortoises should be in their outdoors habitat. Periodically check for debris that could be swept into the burrow opening from gusty winds. Don't block the burrow opening. If it's raining, tortoises may come out of brumation for a quick drink. The ideal winter temperature for brumation is 30-50 degrees Fahrenheit, so allow your tortoise to chill out during the winter season.

## ARE YOU FROM THE JUNGLE?

"Are you from the jungle?" It's one of my most memorable questions from a student at Discovery Charter School. The young boy didn't know it, but that was a defining moment in my career with Tortoise Group. I sadly replied, "No, I'm not from the jungle," thinking to myself how much cooler it would be if I was, "but I am here to tell you all about desert tortoises." I love that I have the opportunity to educate kids and people of all ages about the importance of our state reptile. It is something I, myself, am truly passionate about and love to share.

Growing up, I have always had a love for all animals and taking care of our environment. When I talk to different groups of kids, I know there are young scientists in the making and I want to inspire them to follow their dreams.

- Sarah Mortimer,  
Adoption Coordinator





## CURRENT HAPPENINGS

Hello Tortoise Enthusiasts! 2017 is shaping up to be warmer than usual, and lots of tortoises have emerged (including my Heidi) to bask in the sun. I'm very excited about 2017, and Tortoise Group has all sorts of new projects in the works.

I'd like to say thank you to two wonderful families, the Parsons Family and the Robards Family. Lee and Mary Parsons have generously started the Parsons Family Fellowship Program which has enabled Tortoise Group to hire Dianne McLain as our Volunteer Coordinator as well as partially fund Kym McDonough's adoption help in Reno.

Steve and Becky Robards have generously provided a matching gift for our "Abandoned and Unwanted Tortoise Vet Care" campaign which was very successful.

Tortoise Group intends on adopting 200 tortoises in the state of Nevada in 2017, but we are also starting several wild tortoise conservation efforts in southern Nevada as well as expanding our urgent care efforts for abandoned tortoises.

This is going to be a great year!

Kobbe Shaw,  
Executive Director

An external shell tag with your phone number on it can let someone know that your tortoise needs help. Lost Tortoise Prevention Kits are available on our website and all tortoises who visit our microchip clinics will get one for free.

You can also learn how to mark your tortoise safely with our Tortoise Info Care Sheets.

## From the Board of Directors

Since November 2015 I've had the honor of being Board Chair for Tortoise Group. This lucky position means that I get to have a say in the direction the organization takes, hear about the work of our passionate volunteers, and provide input to the ever-capable workhorse of an Executive Director, Kobbe Shaw. Under his leadership, we've seen a remarkable increase in adoptions as well as crucial community collaborations. The Board meets on a regular basis to help shape policy, provide resources and give support to the efforts of the entire organization.

As Chair, I assist with donor requests and other networking opportunities. I love being involved with Tortoise Group. Being Chair provides me with a wonderful chance to share much needed information with friends and colleagues about this dynamic organization. I came to the Board more than 10 years ago when I was trying to spruce up my resume and give back to my community.

I picked this organization because I had just gotten my very own Desert Tortoise, Spot. Spot joined my family of happy reptiles, including two Russian tortoises, Rocko and Buttercup. I quickly learned how important it was to keep everyone separated, have proper burrows and get them the right food and environment. It was quite the conversation in my house, as Spot was brought home as a surprise by my husband at the time. Spot's parents were a breeding pair housed in a yard in Las Vegas by well-intentioned people who thought they were doing our wildlife population a favor by handing out hatchlings every fall. Spot was one of 11, I believe, that fall. As many of you know, this is actually a terrible practice that we are doing our very best to curb, with your help. Our education programs focus on the cessation of backyard breeding, and our public relations efforts consistently include messages about this important topic.

I love Spot and I wouldn't trade him for the world, in fact, I recently moved into a different home just to have a bigger yard for my growing reptile family. Unbeknownst to me, at some point in time, Rocko and Buttercup must have mated - despite having been separated for at least 5 years prior - as I discovered a tiny surprise one day in March, five years ago, in the form of Baby Herbie. Baby Herbie was likely hatched within a day or so of my father's death, hence his name. While I welcomed Baby Herbie as a wonderful homage to my father, I had run out of room in my tiny yard and needed a new space.

All four of my babies are now safely and securely and separately housed in my new yard with burrows built to their individual sizes and growth potential. Every year I eagerly await their emergence from underground so I can tempt them with dandelion flowers, prickly pear cactus fruit, and other healthy treats. My friends on social media are used to my frequent posts gushing about my cold-blooded babies. Spot wanders into my house pretty much every day during the summer, as his pen is closest to the house and he has access to the sliding glass door. One weekend day, he walked all the way to my bedroom and crawled under my bed and stayed there while I napped. I told all my friends that they might have a dog or a cat to snuggle with, but my tortoise sleeps with me, too!

I hope you enjoy your babies as much as I do mine, and if anyone is looking to either rehome, adopt or get more information on our amazing natural wonder, please hop on the new and improved website or call one of the stellar staff. Here's to a great tortoise season!



## WEBSITE AND MEMBERSHIP UPDATE

Our new website is up and running. Please be aware that old and new users will be required to create a new password. You may not have picked one yet. Simply click on the link "Lost your password?" and enter your email to reset your password. Didn't get an email after a few minutes? Send a quick email to [help@tortoisegroup.org](mailto:help@tortoisegroup.org) requesting a password reset (you can even put "password reset" in the subject line and just put your first and last name in the email and we'll know what to do!) We'll manually reset your password and send it to you in an email. Please continue to let us know issues that come up when using the website and we'll be sure to address each and every one of them. This website is for you. Our goal is to have tortoise information easily available at your fingertips. Thank you for your patience.

## FIRST ADOPTION OF 2017!



**CONGRATULATIONS  
BILLY & DARWIN**

# TORTOISE GROUP

**I WANT TO SUPPORT TORTOISE GROUP  
PLEASE RENEW MY MEMBERSHIP!**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone #: \_\_\_\_\_

☐

\$25

☐

\$40

☐

\$70

☐

\$100

☐

\$250

☐

\$1000 (Life Membership)

Additional Donation \$: \_\_\_\_\_

Please make your check payable to Tortoise Group and return with this form.

**Thank you for all  
your support!**

Please return  
completed form to:  
Tortoise Group  
PO Box 530478  
Henderson, NV 89053-0478

