

Tortoise Group Newsletter



The Organization for the Protection of Nevada's Resident Tortoises, Inc.
A non-profit organization since 1982

Volume XVI No. 2, May 2003

www.tortoisegroup.org

Las Vegas, Nevada

Tortoise Habitat Tour in May

Tortoise owners come up with the most creative and interesting ways to provide for their tortoises, and now's your chance to see some of the best.

Tour four yards to get fresh ideas to improve and enhance your yard. Or, if you are just about to start your yard, cash in on some great concepts.

Habitats range from very large to small, one has a swimming pool, some are desert landscape, some not. Water features, interesting displays of plants tortoise like to eat, sheltering ideas, burrow styles--all available to fire your imagination.

Circle Saturday, May 17 on your calendar. See page 5 for details.

Some Tortoises Still Under

Have your tortoises made an appearance this spring? You can't see them in the burrow? They often turn a corner in their digging. You are almost certain that your tortoises flew south for the winter. A Sioux Indian myth alludes to just that.

Well, have faith. There have hardly been two very warm days in a row. Also, tortoises seem to avoid being above

ground in windy weather. Any day now, we will be complaining of the heat and the tortoises will appear from their southerly haunts, wherever that was.

A good soak. Although some tortoises do not take advantage of the ever-available water dish, when a tortoise is placed in a shallow basin of tepid water it may take a long drink. This good soak is especially valuable when your tortoise first emerges in spring. Pick a nice warm day when he'll be able to dry off thoroughly in the sun.

Visit to Betty's Yard...

Preparing for Hatchlings?

A visit to Betty Burge's yard may be worth your time if you are preparing for hatchlings and small juveniles. You will see a baby pen and have the opportunity to buy the rounded rake roof tiles, so easy to use for creating burrows for hatchlings and small juveniles.

Spineless Cactus, Come and Get it!

Betty will give you hefty pads of spineless cactus that will start to produce the little pads, good food enjoyed by tortoises.

Directions. Betty lives near the intersection Maryland and Tropicana. Call Betty at 739-8043 to set up a time.

Tour and Workshop Promise Summer Entertainment for Kids and Adults

May 17

Tortoise Townhouse and Terraces: a tour of backyard tortoise habitats

June 21

Progress of Tortoise Conservation in Clark County
by Ron Marlow, PhD

July 19

Tortoise Workshop for Kids from Tots to Teens

Jerry Shupe's highly popular interactive workshop on tortoise behavior. Crafts. Mojave Max.

Look for details on pages 5.

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New Member Special!

- ◆ Become a new member of Tortoise Group
- ◆ Receive 10% off on all merchandise, including MegaDiet
- ◆ Know that you are actively supporting tortoise education and care
- ◆ Make a difference in the lives of tortoises in the Las Vegas Valley

And when you join...

- ★ Receive a snazzy tote bag or cap with our thanks

Please fill out the Membership Application on page 7 today!



MEGADIET Satellite Sellers

Rancho & US 95	Chris – 648-7603
Charleston & Nellis	Ruby – 431-0576
Summerlin Area	Cathy – 256-3817 (3 pm – 8 pm)
Tropicana & Maryland	Betty – 739-8043
Henderson, 89015	Laurie – 558-6985
Pahrump	Sheri – 775-727-5557
Out-of-town orders	Betty – 739-8043

A 1½ lb bag costing \$8.00 lasts a large tortoise about one month. MegaDiet is also sold at monthly Tortoise Group meetings.

**10% discount to TG members
who show their cards**

Help sell MegaDiet in these areas:

**Northeast, North (Craig & MLK),
Southwest**

New MegaDiet Seller in the Northwest Area

We are very pleased announce that we now have a Satellite Seller of MegaDiet for those of you in the Northwest part of the valley. Chris lives by N. Rainbow near where Rancho Road and US 95 meet. Call Chris at 648-7603.

Get Involved Selling MegaDiet!

Satellite Sellers of MegaDiet provide a wonderful service to tortoise owners by selling MegaDiet from their homes in locations around the valley. Volunteers are still needed in the northeast, north and southwest areas of town. Please help! Call Betty at 739-8043 to learn what is involved.

Information Directory

TG Hotline	739-8043
Clark County Hotline	383-TORT
Adoption	
Betty Burge	739-8043
School Programs	
Jerry Shupe	648-5190

Tortoises Left Behind When You Move Cause Major Problems: An Open Letter by Betty Burge

To: All Tortoise Owners, especially if you adopted from Tortoise Group. So far this spring, ten tortoises and several Tortoise Group volunteers have been involved in unfortunate situations.

This past winter, unbeknownst to us, several families who had adopted tortoises from us left their homes and moved out of town. Most of these folks thought it would be best for their tortoise to continue hibernating in its burrow. These folks forgot that they were to notify us if they planned to move. If they had, we would have told them that they could remove the tortoise during hibernation and that they were responsible for doing so. In addition, we would have reminded them that the tortoise is supposed to come back to Tortoise Group at that time. It is not to be given to the new occupant or any one else and not left for the new to call us when the tortoise emerges from hibernation.

As a result of our not being called in time, sometimes there was no one in the house when the tortoise emerged from hibernation. In some cases it was difficult to arrange access to a property when the house was unoccupied.

Often new occupants have been told to call us as soon as the tortoise emerges from

hibernation. Some did and some didn't. Some wanted to keep the tortoise and saw no need to call.

Tortoises that were left at the house where a new family moved in were at the mercy of folks with incomplete information on care. In all cases if the new family was willing to turn over the tortoise, they expected us to come and dig up the burrow. This put a repeated burden on a limited number of volunteers.

Some new occupants did not want to let us on the property to collect the tortoise. When a new family moved in, some yards became unsafe for a tortoise and the needed changes were more than the new occupant was willing to do. Or, the changes would take time. Meanwhile the tortoise was in jeopardy. At one home, the new occupant's dog killed the tortoise.

In another case, the family left the state. The house was unoccupied for months without our knowing. The gate barrier had been removed and the gate left open. We have not been able to locate the tortoise. We think the tortoise escaped or was stolen.

Please do not leave a tortoise at your unoccupied house or assume that the next occupant of the home will want to adopt the tortoise or will call us. The tortoise you adopted from us is **not** yours to give

away. A Tortoise Group Adoption Committee member must talk with each potential caretaker and evaluate each situation. We have adoption papers that the U.S Fish and Wildlife Service requires the new caretaker to sign.

We ask that you: (1) Call to tell us of your plans to move before you move. Notifying us is part of the agreement you signed when you adopted your tortoise. (2) Have your tortoise accessible, ready to be transferred back to us – or if instructed by us, given to the Tortoise Pick-up Service before you leave, and (3) Dig your tortoise out of its burrow, if necessary, regardless of the time of year. The tortoise will go back to sleep if it is winter.

If the tortoise was **not** adopted from Tortoise Group, we suggest that you do not leave it in the yard where no one is living. If you do not have a good home for the tortoise before you move, call the Tortoise Pick-up Service. Have the tortoise ready to hand over to them at the time they arrange for pickup. The Pick-up Service staff will come to your home, but they do not dig the tortoise out from the burrow. They take the tortoise to their facility and care for it. It will then be available for adoption or other programs authorized by the U.S Fish and Wildlife Service.

How Do You Feel About Your Tortoises?

I want to know how you feel about your tortoises! This part of my doctoral dissertation study in clinical psychology investigates the feelings and relationships between humans and the animals that share their lives, particularly Desert Tortoises. Thank you to the long-time Tortoise Group members who may remember the 1995 questionnaire, and welcome to more recent members.

The new, expanded Tortoise Caretaking Questionnaire – Revised form is enclosed in this Newsletter. It has a questionnaire on one side and a few brief questions on the flip side about people's feelings and/or relationships with their desert tortoises. If you currently care for tortoises or have in the past, please have the primary caretaker of the tortoise(s) fill out both sides of the questionnaire. Only mail-in, hard-copy, completed questionnaires will be used in the study. If you receive the Tortoise Group Newsletter electronically and would like to participate, Karen will send you a hard copy, pre-addressed and stamped. Please email **Karen Kampf** at:

tortoiseproject2003@compuserve.com

Subject Line: **Tortoise Project 2003 Response**

All responses are anonymous. When you have completed the questionnaire, please fold over the pre-addressed, postage-paid form so the address and stamp are visible to your postal carrier, tape it for closure, and mail at your earliest convenience.

Even if you participated in the 1995 study, please complete the entire revised questionnaire, as the new form includes new information and gives you an opportunity to express more personal comments about you and your Desert Tortoises.

I would like to thank Tortoise Group for, once again, allowing me to conduct an opinion survey that allows people to express their feelings and motivations about the caretaking of Desert Tortoises. This study explores the unique aspect of human feelings regarding the Desert Tortoises that are part of our lives. The results will be presented at a future Tortoise Group meeting and/or in future editions of the Tortoise Group newsletter. Your participation is greatly appreciated!

Karen Kampf, M.A

Effort to Stop Release of Helium-Filled Balloons

We are continuing our efforts to inform the public about the littering and hazards to wildlife caused by helium-filled balloons that return to earth. By the next legislative session, we hope to join other states that are introducing legislation to control the release of these balloons.

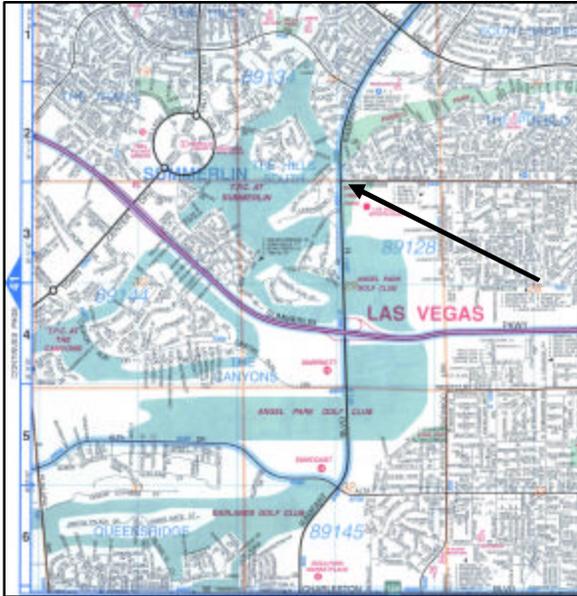
Helium-filled balloons affect more than wildlife as the following testimonial indicates. "I was gratified to see that your fine organization is protective of other species as well as tortoises. I am a veterinarian and have seen many land animals killed by these balloons. I have done necropsies on horses, cattle

and other land species killed by balloons. I have also pulled them [balloons] out of other animals and thus prevented their demise. One such was at the Beefmaster show in Reno, Nevada. Please continue your good work. Dr. Bob."

**Tortoise Adoptions
and Consultations
Are Free
Call 739-8043**

Summer Meetings

May 17 **Tortoise Townhouses and Terraces: a tour of tortoise habitats**
Saturday **in the Summerlin area**
8:30 am



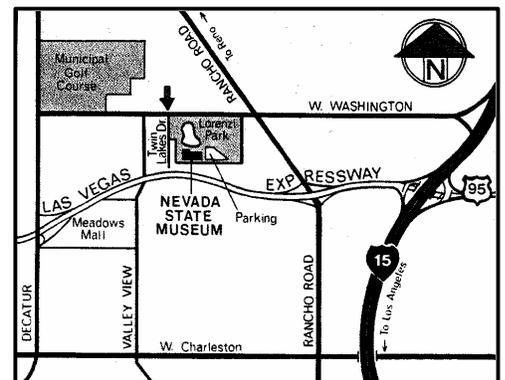
Tour four creative and attractive habitats with a variety of styles and features. On a half acre or a small Summerlin lot, find ways to make a yard healthy for tortoises and humans. See water features, plants tortoises actually eat, burrow designs and shelters, gate barriers, and knolls.

Directions: From 8:30-9:00 am, get a tour map at the Tortoise Group tent at Bruce Trent Park on Rampart & Vegas Drive. From US 95 west, take Summerlin Parkway, and exit at Rampart. Turn right (north) and drive ½ mile to the light at Vegas Drive. Turn right and then right again into the park. We'll put the tent with our banner in the parking lot, visible from Rampart. Tour the yards between 9 am and 12 noon.

Nevada State Museum and Historical Society
700 Twin Lakes Drive (in Lorenzi Park)
Saturday, 1-3 pm

(No admission charge to folks attending the Tortoise Group meeting)

June 21 **Progress of Tortoise Conservation**
in Clark County, by Ron Marlow, PhD biologist



With a wit and understanding that gives true insight into tortoise conservation, Ron Marlow will discuss the status of the myriad of projects involving habitat for tortoises and numerous other species in trouble.

July 19 **Tortoise Workshop for Kids from Tots to Teens**
by Jerry Shupe, tortoise specialist

Bring the whole family (ages 3 and up) to Jerry's famous interactive presentation of tortoise behavior. Jerry promises to delight, entertain, and teach us all. Then, after a refreshment break, everyone is invited to make a tortoise craft (adults, too!). Participation, live tortoises, and Mojave Max!

If you should have any questions about the programs, dates, or locations, or if you would like further directions, please feel free to call Program Chairman Kathy Utiger at 804-0472. MegaDiet, t-shirts, caps, tote bags available at general meetings.

Members' Corner

Jerry's Tortoise Workshops for Kids

We are delighted to invite you to Jerry Shupe's terrific tortoise craft workshop on July 19. This fun and educational afternoon for the entire family will be a great break from the summer heat.

Jerry is still collecting materials for the crafts. Please bring items on the list below to general meetings.

Craft materials needed

- Buttons (especially brown)
- Plastic yogurt and cottage cheese containers
- Tuna cans (clean & without lids)
- Paper egg cartons
- Sequins, glitter
- Pieces of ribbon, felt, lace
- Plastic tops of drink/water bottles
- River rocks, 4-6 inch diameter
- Children's pails
- "Moss"
- Cardboard, thin (cereal boxes)

Join in the fun and the learning! Plan now to bring your children to Jerry's July 19 workshop.

First 50/50 Raffle a Great Success

The first 50/50 raffle brought in \$48 dollars, of which half went to Tortoise Group. The lucky winner of \$24 was Jerry Shupe. Congratulations, Jerry. More Raffles will be held at the June, August, and September meetings.

New T-shirts Now Available

The very popular spruce-colored Tortoise Group t-shirt is now available for sale. You can also purchase the snappy new tote bags and caps. And of course, 10% off to Tortoise Group members.

T-shirts	\$16.00
Tote bags	10.00
Caps	10.00

Circle These Dates for Tortoise Group Events

- May 17 – Tour of Backyard Tortoise Habitats in LV
- June 21 – Tortoise Habitat Update, Ron Marlow
- July 19 – Children's Tortoise Craft Workshop
- August 16 – Toad Conservation, Karen Hoff
- September 20 – Annual Meeting & Guest Speaker
- October 19 – Tortoise Group Picnic

EcoJam 2003 at Sunset Park

Earth Day 2003 celebrated beautiful weather and cheery spirits. Wonderful environmental booths and displays afforded fairgoers many opportunities for environmentally friendly upgrades and nifty new ideas. Several exhibits gave kids a hands-on chance to learn about science and the earth. Clark County gave free flowers to all (even yummy petunias for our tortoises). Unfortunately, turnout for was lighter than anticipated.



Kathy and Derek show off their Tortoise Group t-shirts and caps at EcoJam

Notes From Betty

Burrows Catch Litter

The recent winds have resulted in litter, especially plastic, being driven into tortoise burrows. There is something about burrow openings that capture wind-blown litter. Whole grocery bags are the worst culprits because of their size and because tortoises may become tangled in the handles. The trick is to check your burrows immediately following windy days or nights, before the debris is driven too far into the burrow to reach.

I have rescued a tortoise from entanglement which forced the plastic tightly across the tortoise's nostrils with each step. One little tortoise was actually rolled up in a large piece of debris and I found the

tortoise on its back inside a "tube" formed by the wind tumbling the plastic. I have also found plastic almost completely covering the water in the water dish. The lighting made the plastic invisible until I looked carefully. Take a few minutes to make a tour of your yard. Prevent trouble that the tortoise may not be able to avoid.

Evening Primrose Still Confined

Two years ago, I planted some Evening Primroses where I thought they would not become invasive. They are surrounded by several feet of dry soil which to date has kept them under control. Knowing that this species is very hard to remove once established, tending to go wherever there is damp soil. I have tried to beat the invasiveness and show that this lovely

plant that tortoises like to eat can be enjoyed and controlled. So far, I'm winning!

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The Tortoise Group newsletter is published three times yearly:
 March, May, and August

TORTOISE GROUP MEMBERSHIP - CONTRIBUTION FORM

Memberships and contributions may be tax-deductible

Name: _____	Phone: _____	(please check)
		INDIVIDUAL 15.00 _____
		FAMILY 25.00 _____
Street: _____		SUSTAINING 35.00 _____
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		LIFE 200.00 _____
Email address: _____		ADDITIONAL CONTRIBUTION _____
<input type="checkbox"/> Yes, I would like to receive my newsletter by email		
Renewing member <input type="checkbox"/>	New member <input type="checkbox"/>	
Except for Life members, memberships expire each Dec.31		TOTAL AMOUNT ENCLOSED _____

Make check payable to Tortoise Group. Mail with application to Tortoise Group, 5157 Poncho Cir. Las Vegas, NV 89119

**Tortoise Group Newsletter,
e-mail style**

Thank you to the sixty-eight people who have now signed up to receive their newsletters by email! Already we are seeing the savings in printing and postage costs. Of course the savings to the environment are even greater. Another benefit to being on our email list is that email recipients receive timely reminders of Tortoise Group meetings and other activities.

The snag in the system is that folks switch email providers with some frequency, and they neglect to inform us. So, when you sign up for email, we ask that you give us your telephone number so we can find you should your email be undeliverable.

If you would care to continue the savings, e-mail your name and phone number to Kathy Utiger at utiger@juno.com

Websites of Interest

- Tortoise Group www.tortoisegroup.org
- Desert Tortoise Council www.deserttortoise.org
- California Turtle and Tortoise Club
www.tortoise.org
- Tortoise Trust (United Kingdom and the USA)
www.tortoisetrust.org
- American tortoise Rescue
(Southern California) www.tortoise.com
- Desert Tortoise Preserve Committee (California)
www.tortoise-tracks.org

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