

Tortoise Group Newsletter



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

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www.tortoisegroup.org

Las Vegas, Nevada

Tortoise Group Presents Exciting Interactive Workshop Program

Would you like to become a desert tortoise expert and help combat the ignorance and abuse of pet tortoises? Would you like to share your knowledge of tortoises with children, with adults?

The brainstormers present the first result of their efforts to revitalize Tortoise Group: a series of four interactive workshops complements learning-by-doing projects with our staff of experts. Please turn to page 2 for the details.

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Seasonal Tips

Late Risers

Most but not all tortoises are up. Getting up is a gradual activity. Little teasers seem to be part of tortoise behavior. They may come out of the cold burrow, bask a bit, and then pick a superficial site for cover instead of the burrow for a week or more! Just be patient. All is well, as long as you are sure that your tortoise is not trapped in the burrow behind or under collapsed soil.

If you suspect that your tortoise might be trapped, Pete Ferdig can come to the rescue with his Burrow Camera. Call Pete at 336-9460 to arrange a time.

Egg Laying Starts Soon

Egg-laying season is about to begin. After all the rain the soil at the front of most burrows will be very firm. Tortoises often lay their eggs just inside or just outside the burrow opening. Make the job a bit easier by loosening the soil to a depth of about 5 inches and then pressing down with your feet. If it is too loose it will not hold its shape as the female tries to dig a firm-sided cavity. If the ground is wet where she makes the nest, the eggs should be moved. Call Betty for help at 739-8043. We are working on a

new information sheet about moving eggs.

Extra Babies?

When it becomes hard to find responsible homes for your babies, it is time to think about separating your breeders. The Tortoise Holding Facility will take your extra babies if you have done your part to stop reproduction.

Food Stuffs - Dandelions

Before the outside temperatures become too hot to transplant dandelions, grab a bucket and head to Betty's house. Betty has many extras to offer. Call her at 739-8043 to arrange a time.

If you are enticing your tortoise to accept MegaDiet, having growing dandelions available is insurance that the tortoise will not suffer lack of good food. Betty also has spineless cactus to give.

Have you discovered an ornamental that your tortoise eats that is not on our list? Let us know and we will add it. One gentleman called to say that his tortoise has been eating Oleander for 13 years with no ill effect! We hesitated to include that one.

Interactive Workshop Program

By popular demand we are starting to build a team of desert tortoise experts as part of our mission to combat the ignorance and abuse of pet tortoises. Despite love, ignorance results in unintentional abuse and premature death that is more common than generally known. Most of you have a working knowledge of tortoise care and biology and a deep concern for these very special animals. We are going to build on that knowledge and concern with a workshop program that includes leaning-by-doing. We hope that the program will be both fun as well as educational. Eventually you should be able to answer just about any question that comes your way about our endearing desert tortoises.

How Does This Workshop Program Work?

The four major topics that will be covered are services that Tortoise Group provides to the public: 1) visiting yards to brief folks preparing to adopt a tortoise or to improve their yard for a tortoise they already have, 2) teaching children through classroom presentations, 3) developing tortoise habitats at schools, and 4) providing information to the public who visit our information booth at fairs.

Each topic has two parts. The first part is the interactive workshop: fun, interesting, and challenging demonstrations presented by our team of experts with you participating. The second part is the application of skills gained at the workshops. You will engage in learn-by-doing experiences in people's yards, at school habitats, with visitors at fairs, and in the classroom.

Learn-by Doing

You will sign up to accompany Betty or Jerry, one or two at a time, to visit schools or yards—year-round opportunities. As you become experienced, you may wish to take on more responsibility. Tortoise Group responds on demand, so you will be called as requests come in. We realize that you have commitments. We will just say that the more

concentrated your experience, the faster you will learn and become an expert.

Designed for You

- Each workshop will be given twice, in different locations - one in the afternoon and one in the evening.
- Attend one, two or all of the workshops.
- Begin Learn-by-Doing at any time - it's not necessary to attend a workshop first. All parts of the program complement each other.
- Sign up for Learn-by-Doing or attend the workshops just for your own pleasure.

Comments from Volunteers

"Volunteering at the tortoise habitats allows me to combine my love for gardening with my love for tortoises. I dig it!" Debbie Forbush

"In the classroom Jerry [Shupe] gave me little tasks at first like handing out materials, and as my confidence grew I started taking over major sections of her presentation. Now I feel that I am making a real contribution." Pete Fertig

"I have had the unique opportunity to accompany Betty Burge to almost one dozen yard inspections this year. Anyone who says that Las Vegas is a "cold town" hasn't met the warm, caring individuals that I have had the pleasure to visit with over the past few months. I was a little surprised at how much I enjoyed doing the inspections because it was intended as a learning experience so that I could help ease the burden on our busy leader."

Every single visit has been rewarding on a personal level. The people we visited have all shown great appreciation for our promptness, professionalism and willingness to come to their homes with the valued advice they are seeking. It isn't easy work at all but the payoff is great and immediate. The time spent is not demanding and there is always room for more volunteers." Rich Ruocco

Interactive Workshop Schedule

	Yards Visits	Classroom Presentations	School Habitats	Fairs
Dates	May 15, 17	June 19, 21	July 17, 19 at schools	August 21, 23
Workshop Topic	Important introduction: Betty will present the basics in a slide show, "How a Tortoise Works"	Jerry will give a classroom presentation--we will be the students	Jerry will show before-and-after slides of habitats and discuss the challenges of a school situation	Kathy will discuss strategies for setup, personnel stations, eliciting questions, etc.
Interactive Section	You will break into groups with photos of yard problems and preparation mistakes. Identify what's wrong and suggest solutions.	You will participate as Jerry's assistants, as you would in a classroom.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • View student tortoise projects • Surf the school tortoise website • Tour the habitat--discuss how challenges were met 	At a mock fair booth, you'll take part as staff and visitors. Use question cards provided to elicit typical or tricky questions.

Locations: Each workshop will be given twice at two different locations and times.

May 15, June 19, August 21 - Saturday, 1-3 pm at the NV State Museum and Historical Society in Lorenzi Park (see map on page 6)

May 17, June 21, August 23 - Monday, 6:45-8:45 at the Saturn Dealership in Henderson

Directions: Saturn is on the east side of Gibson Road, just north of Auto Show Drive between I-215 and Warm Springs. You can exit US 93/95/I-515 onto Auto Show Drive from the north only. Park near the Showroom and look for us. We will direct you to Community Room upstairs.

July 17 and 19 will be at the School Habitats

July 17 at Lummis Elementary School, 9000 Hillpointe Rd. in Summerlin. From Summerlin Pkwy, go about 1 ½ miles north on Rampart to the light at Hillpointe. Turn left and go about ½ mile. The school will be on your right, just east of Hills Park. Meet at the front door.

July 19 at Whitney Elementary School, 5005 Keenan Ave. on the east side of town. Take Tropicana east. Just after Boulder Hwy, you will see the school on your right. Turn right on Missouri Ave., then quickly left on Dodd and left onto Keenan to reach the front of the school. Meet at the front door.

"With our emphasis on teaching children and helping them use their adopted tortoises in educational ways we are investing in the future stewards of our desert. The children are concerned for and take a proprietary interest in desert critters. Time spent learning the skills to help teach children about the tortoise and its place in the desert ecosystem is time well spent." Betty Burge

Desert Tortoise Council

Meeting Brings Raves

The Desert Tortoise Council Symposium at Sam's Town in February was a big success as usual. Robert Stebbins autographed copies of his new *Field Guide to Western Reptiles and Amphibians*. You can find the description of the event and abstracts of the papers presented on the Desert Tortoise Council Website at <http://deserttortoise.org/symposium/2004/index.html>.

Website Sports Two New Links

You may wish to browse our Website, which is being constantly improved by our new Webmaster and Board member, Rich Ruocco.

Habitat Photos. Have you seen the photos of tortoises in their habitats? If you would like to submit digital photos of your tortoises, read the submission guidelines under *Photos & Habitats* on our Website.

Information Sheets. All 26 Information Sheets are available in print-friendly format. Check out #21 for the list of plants to grow for tortoises.

Tortoise Adoptions
and Consultations
Are Free
Call 739-8043

Keep in Touch by E-mail

If you care to give us your email address, we can send updates and reminders of events and alert you to happenings that come up between issues of the newsletter. For example, members planned the wonderful field trip on April 25 to see tortoises in the wild (see page 5). We can also tell you about the progress being made on the revitalization effort that is being designed for you.

Mr. Bush Does It Again

President Bush recently talked about the government's new Landowner Incentive Program, which offers \$26 million in grants to private land owners to protect habitat for at-risk species. That good news is offset by the fact this recent budget proposal slashed funding for endangered species recovery by almost \$10 million—putting it at its lowest level since the president took office.

http://www.nrdc.org/bushrecord/wildlife_species.asp#1451

Surprise Verdict

"Nevada Federal Land Sale Halted. Affects Water in Clark County. The land disposal was authorized by the Lincoln Co. Land Act (LCLA)." The LCLA authorized the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) to sell a total of 13,000 acres of federal land in Lincoln Co. Nevada—northeast of Las Vegas and just north of Mesquite—over a period of five years. The Court held that BLM violated the

National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) by:

- Neglecting to analyze the impact of pulling water from nearby basins to supply development of federal land;
- Failing to develop mitigation plans sufficient to protect five threatened and endangered species;
- Ignoring the cumulative impacts of the LCLA combined with other planned development for the region—additional land privatization, a power plant, and a new Mesquite regional airport. Together, the action would open more than 36,000 acres to development and would have supported 200,000 people in the Mesquite area.

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Utiger

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

Field Trip Fruitful and

Glorious by Rich Ruocco

The annual spring field trip took us to Jean, Nevada on Sunday, April 25th, to the Large-Scale Translocation Site (LSTS) on a perfect spring day.

Experimental translocations of desert tortoises to the site began in April of 1997 with great success. Desert tortoises that are rescued or lawfully removed from the Las Vegas Valley are held in pens at the Desert Tortoise Conservation Center and a number of those tortoises have been released at the LSTS. Tortoise Group observed quite a few during the visit but the accounts are still coming in as we go to press with our Newsletter.

Sixteen members participated in the event, meeting at 8:00 AM



Tortoise rests in a shady spot

sharp near Jean, Nevada. After a quick pep talk and some information sheets from Betty, we caravanned into the desert to find some tortoises. Two eager members quickly located a mid-sized tortoise sporting the

telltale orange spot on its shell, indicating it had been part of the translocation effort. The group then splintered into smaller parties with several members ranging quite far from the parked cars. Most everyone reported seeing tortoises of varying sizes, numerous burrows, good spring forage and sign of tortoises and other animals along the way.



Betty briefs the group on desert etiquette and gives hints on spotting tortoises at the Desert Tortoise Translocation Site near Jean, NV.

Most of this information will be incorporated into a permanent gallery on our Web Site along with the photos taken by those who attended. We will add the accounts and photos as they come in, so check our pages often! Instructions for submitting photos and stories from the trip are available now under *Photos & Habitats* at the Tortoise Group Website: <http://www.tortoisegroup.org/>.

Help Dig a Burrow

Would you be willing and able to assist an experienced burrow digger create a safe home for a magnificent tortoise? Occasionally we have requests for help from someone who is unable to dig a burrow. To pitch in, call Betty at 739-8043.

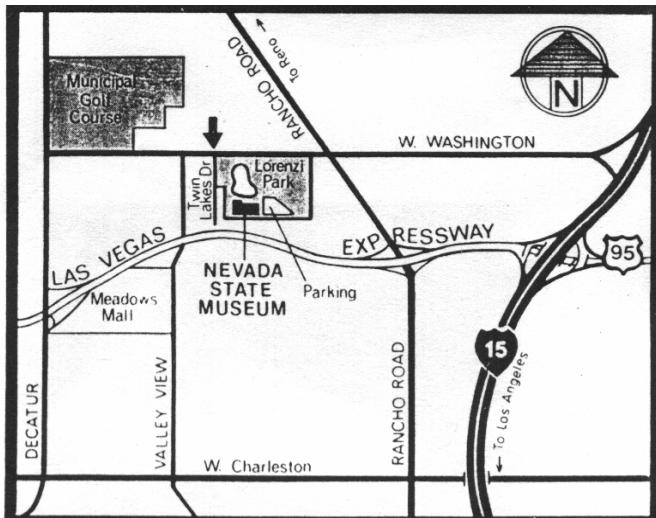
Lend Your Expertise to Tortoise Group

Our revitalization project requires experts in many areas and folks willing to take on all varieties of interesting projects, some of which are even small! Many have nothing to do with tortoises directly. We are especially hoping to find some people to assist with giving advice on advertising our program. If that's not your area, how about becoming a Board member? Do you like to organize? Do you like to work alone or be part of a team? Brainstorming has produced many fabulous ideas just waiting for someone to take the ball and run with it.

Have fun. Catch the tortoise spirit! Call Betty to get involved, 739-8043.

Show Your Support for Tortoise Group

If your tortoise is out of hibernation, then it is definitely time to pay your Tortoise Group dues. Please use the Membership Form on page 7 and carefully select the way in which you wish to receive the newsletter. Thank you



MEGADIET Satellite Sellers

Please call sellers for appointment.

Charleston & Rancho	Carolyn – 878-4297
Charleston & Nellis	Ruby – 431-0576 (8 am-4 pm)
Washburn & Allen	Kim – 639-4862 (after 4:30 pm M-F, all day Sat & Sun)
Summerlin Area	Cathy – 256-3817 (3:30 – 8 pm M-F, all day Sat & Sun)
Tropicana & Maryland	Betty – 739-8043
Henderson, 89015	Laurie – 558-6985 (after 12:00 noon)
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**

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

What I Like

by Wanda the Wanderer

The plants I like in the spring would make me sing (if I could). I like my young grape leaves and shoots mixed with hollyhock flowers and leaves sprinkled with a passel of dandelion greens (I especially like those pretty yellow flowers). Now all this is smothered with gazania flowers and rose petals. Some desert primrose would be nice too! (I enjoy the whole plant, but the flowers and buds really catch my eye, since pink is my favorite color). My dad treats me really special by serving this scrumptious meal on a bed of very young and tender mulberry leaves served al fresco on the lawn.

Later in summer, I find lots of goodies myself. Dad planted desert willows (two different kinds) umm-ummm are those flowers good! But I'm really partial

to the catalpa flowers on the other side of the yard. It's truly amazing that all of this just falls from heaven!

I do, however, have to force myself to eat wild Bermuda grass which is always enhanced by a delicious cluster of white clover (Thumper, eat your heart out. Those little white flowers are to die for—the living end!).

Ya know, I wouldn't be a healthy fifteen years old, twelve inches long, and eleven pounds if Dad hadn't cared so much about me. Oh! I have to go now. I think my hearty breakfast is ready!

Bye now,
Wanda the Wanderer
Written with the help of my dad, Peter L. Barilla, Jr.

Tortoise Group Membership Form

Memberships and contributions may be tax deductible

Name _____ Phone _____ Individual 15.00 _____

Street _____ Family 25.00 _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____ Sustaining 35.00 _____

E-mail address _____ Additional Contribution _____ Sponsor 50.00 _____

Corporate 75.00 _____

Life 200.00 _____

- " Send my newsletter in hard copy
- " Send my newsletter by email
- " Send my newsletter in hard copy,
and send meeting notices and other news by e-mail

Total Amount Enclosed _____

" Renewing member " New member

Except for Life members, memberships expire each December 31

Occupation _____ Special skills/Interests _____

Make check payable to Tortoise Group. Mail with application to:
Tortoise Group, 1201 S. Casino Center, Las Vegas, NV 89104