

# Tortoise Group Newsletter

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

Volume XIX No. 2 May 2006

[www.tortoisegroup.org](http://www.tortoisegroup.org)

Las Vegas, Nevada

## My tortoise has not come out yet. Should I worry?

With few exceptions, tortoises should have emerged by now. However, we have only had one or two warm days in a row since early February. Have you used a mirror to reflect sunlight into the burrow? Or used a flashlight at night? If you can see the tortoise, take a pole or something that will reach the foot, and touch it. The tortoise should pull in the foot even if sleeping. Or is the tortoise out of sight, apparently having dug around the corner or all you see is a pile of soil?

**The Snooper.** Very soon we will have a dandy new burrow scope named "The Snooper." We can bring The Snooper to your tortoise burrow and send the probe down to the tortoise or obstruction and view the situation on a screen. Then we can better recommend a solution. Some tortoises have been alive but trapped, and excavating the burrow has been the only answer. There is a way to do this that is less destructive and can be less work than removing all the soil from the roof. See fee details on p.7. Call Tortoise Group at 739-8043 so we can help.

## Life Memberships

If you haven't sent in your membership yet, remember that the year 2006 will be the last year that you can purchase a Life Membership for \$200. Beginning in 2007, the amount will increase to \$500. Get this deal while it's hot!



Handsome wild tortoise. Photo donated

## What To Do If You Find a Tortoise

### ...In the Desert

Do not touch it or its burrow shelter. These tortoises are protected by law.

### ...On a Road or Highway through the Desert

Leave it alone unless you think that the tortoise is in danger of being hit by a vehicle and it is safe for you to stop. Approach the tortoise from the front, pick it up firmly by the sides and take it a few yards into the desert in the direction the tortoise was heading. Set it down under a shrub, if possible.

### ...In a City Street or a Developed Area

Collect it, take it home immediately, and put it in a box inside the house. It must be kept cool. Immediately call the Tortoise Pick-up Service at 593-9027. You are not to keep the tortoise or put it in your yard. The owner may be looking for it and call the Pick-up Service. If you want to adopt this or any tortoise, your yard must be made ready first. Call Tortoise Group for help, 739-7113.

**Question Corner**

By Betty Burge

**Q. The most-asked questions this month have to do with what to do about the various results of taking in a tortoise that was found wandering in the street or unexpectedly in the caller's yard.**

Please see page 1 for the information that we all need to have ready to apply.

**A.** Tortoise Group tries to prevent your not being prepared to care for a tortoise you found by having you prepare in advance. The wandering tortoise should not be kept but may be available for adoption after you are ready for it. We have injuries, escapes and overheated tortoises, damp burrows and illness that result from inadequate shelter and diet. A wandering tortoise may have an owner looking for it.

**Q. What should I do when I go away for a weekend or on vacation?**

**A.** The best place for your tortoise when you are gone is in its own familiar yard. Even an excellent place to board is not as good as home. Besides we know of no place to board that will provide all the tortoise's needs. The stress of a new place is not good for the tortoise. At home it knows where to go for shelter from the heat, for food and water. You probably have a friend or neighbor whom you can trust to check for trouble and even offer MegaDiet.

The important things are to have sufficient growing plant foods that the tortoise can access and gates that can be locked. Even if there is no one to offer MegaDiet, the tortoise will be fine living off the land. A periodic check for not being turned over or without water should put you at ease. We even have a Tortoise Group member who has long experience caring for tortoises left alone while the family is away. Her service is not free but she definitely has a way with tortoises and other critters, making her a valuable resource. Call Jerry at 493-5489.

**MegaDiet  
Satellite Sellers**

Please call sellers for appointment

- |                                     |                                       |
|-------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| Nellis & Owens                      | Georgi – 459-1274                     |
| Camino al Norte & W. Ann Rd         | Greg & Char – 649-1630                |
| I-215 & Lone Mtn                    | Lynn – 655-5698                       |
| Summerlin                           | Kathy – 804-0472<br>9am – 7pm         |
| Rainbow & Alta                      | Sherri – 255-1357                     |
| Charleston & Rancho                 | <b>Seeking volunteer</b>              |
| Tropicana & Maryland                | Betty – 739-8043                      |
| Industrial & Blue Diamond           | Carolyn – 876-0668, ext. 874          |
| Green Valley, Eastern & Windmill    | Ed & Pat – 269-7108                   |
| Henderson, Lake Mead & Warm Springs | Laurie – 558-6985<br>(after 11:00 am) |
| Henderson, Boulder Hwy & Equestrian | Gail – 564-0031                       |
| Boulder City, NV Hwy & Adams        | Patty – 293-7263                      |
| Pahrump                             | Sheri – 775-727-5557                  |
| Out-of-town orders                  | Betty – 702-739-8043                  |

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

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

## **May – July Meeting Schedule**

1:00 – 3:00 pm

Nevada State Museum and Historical Society  
(in Lorenzi Park – see map below)

### **May 7, Sunday**

**Field Trip to the Desert Tortoise Conservation Center (DTCC)**

**Time:** 9 am – noon

**Place:** DTCC (directions below)

**New Directions:** Travel west on Blue Diamond to Buffalo (app. 1 mile west of Rainbow, the old turnoff). At Buffalo, turn left (south) and continue until it ends at Starr Rd. Turn left (east) to Rainbow. Again turn left and go a very short distance to the power line road, which takes you to the DTCC. Only the power line road is unpaved now! Look for the Tortoise Group signs.



Wild tortoises. Photo donated

### **May 20, Saturday**

**A Veterinarian Talks about Tortoise Care**

**By Randy Winn, DVM**

Start making your list now of questions to ask this very knowledgeable and experienced tortoise veterinarian. Dr. Winn will go over the subtle signs of good vs poor tortoise health, he'll describe what to watch out for, and he plans to spend a good deal of time answering your specific questions. Leave your tortoise at home, but expect to see a live tortoise for demonstration.

### **June 17, Saturday**

**How a Tortoise Works –**

**Habitat Needs and Reproduction**

**By Betty Burge, M.S.**

Betty's "can't miss" two-part series on tortoise care describes the elements of a good tortoise habitat and the basics of tortoise behavior. Betty's amazing ability to help us understand how a reptile functions and to translate that into needs of a backyard habitat makes this talk a must for tortoise owners. Expect to learn a lot.

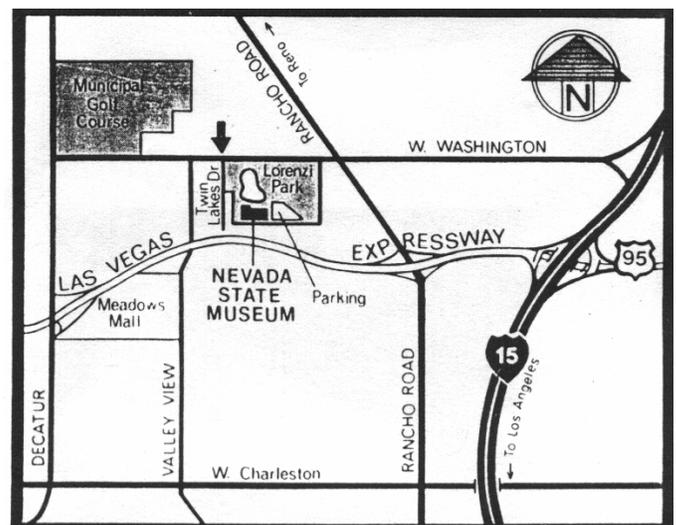
### **July 15, Saturday**

**Tortoise Workshop for Kids –**

**Creatures and Crafts**

**By Jerry Shupe**

Break the summer doldrums with Jerry's highly entertaining and informative interactive workshop. Parents and kids will learn about tortoises as Jerry delights and informs us with her tortoise antics. Tortoise craft projects will give each child a lasting memory of this special occasion.



## **Dr. K's Kolumn**

**By Christine Kolmstetter, DVM  
Cheyenne West Animal Hospital**

Hello again! As you recall from our last newsletter column, we were discussing LuLu the desert tortoise and her visit to the veterinarian. Her caretakers brought her in for an examination because she had recently come out of her burrow and was somewhat lethargic and not eating well. After questioning the caretakers regarding LuLu's history, diet, behavior, and environment, we learned that although LuLu appears to have an appropriate outdoor burrow, she is often brought indoors during the summer and also has been hibernated indoors during the winter months in previous years. We reminded the caretakers that desert tortoises are native desert animals, and that LuLu is best housed outdoors year-round.

It is extremely important that the backyard area is safe, that there are no drowning hazards or poisonous plants, that the yard is escape-proof and has shaded areas, and that adequate clean drinking water is always available. Ideally, the backyard should also contain native plants which can provide a natural food source for LuLu in addition to the MegaDiet tortoise pellets. Also, it is important that other pets such as dogs do not have access to LuLu. Dog bite injuries, unfortunately, are very common and can be deadly to desert tortoises, and tortoise droppings can potentially cause serious gastrointestinal upset to other animals if they are ingested.

Now that we've obtained LuLu's history and answered questions regarding proper desert tortoise care, it's time for LuLu's physical examination. While we have been discussing LuLu's care, we have placed LuLu on the exam room floor. Normally, a healthy tortoise is extremely curious when put in new surroundings and actively sniffs the ground while wandering around. LuLu, however, takes only a few steps and then closes her eyes. Her nostrils are moist and a moderate amount of bubbly material is being produced from her nostrils when she exhales. Her legs also appear very thin. As we lift her for closer examination, we are

careful to hold her upright and not turn her upside down. We notice that her bottom shell (the "plastron") is very flat, the portion of her bottom shell directly underneath her neck (the "gular scute") is very short, and her tail is very short, all of which highly suggest that LuLu is indeed a female. Her 14-inch body length also suggests that she is an adult.

As we place Lulu on the scale to obtain her weight, we also notice that her eyes are very sunken and her skin is abnormally taut, both of which are signs of dehydration. LuLu readily allows us to gently open her mouth, and we notice that her tongue appears somewhat pale and dry. Healthy tortoises often resist attempts at opening their mouths, and LuLu's lack of resistance also suggests overall weakness. It can be difficult to obtain a heart rate for a tortoise, especially when they retract their head and legs into their shell. LuLu, however, keeps her head and legs relatively limp and allows us to obtain a pulse.

LuLu's lack of energy, "runny" nose, closed eyes, dehydration, pale tongue, and overall poor body condition are all very suggestive of significant health problems. Since the shell of a tortoise acts as a "helmet" around most of the body, it is almost impossible for us as veterinarians to feel, or "palpate," internal organs as we can in mammals such as dogs or cats. Therefore, we often resort to diagnostics such as x-rays to obtain additional information. Ultrasound, and even MRI and CAT scans can be utilized in tortoises, although these are much less commonly used. In addition, obtaining a blood sample is extremely useful to determine if there are any changes suggestive of infection or abnormalities in kidney or liver function.

So I'll have a technician assist me, and we'll obtain a blood sample from LuLu and take some x-rays. Also we'll hospitalize LuLu for some "supportive care" in an effort to get her hydrated and feeling better. We'll discuss our supportive care efforts and LuLu's diagnostic test results, and we'll show you LuLu's x-rays in our next newsletter. See you then!

## **Alert! The Endangered Species Act (ESA) is under Attack**

excerpted with permission from the Tortuga Gazette

A major vote will be happening very soon on the ESA. As members involved with turtle and tortoise conservation, it is important to understand the ESA and to take action to protect it if you wish.

An unprecedented and wide-ranging legislative assault already underway would harm America's endangered species, threaten our national parks, forests and wildlife refuges, and remove protection for our health and the environment. The attacks are spearheaded by former House Majority Leader Tom Delay who appointed Congressman Richard Pombo, Resources Committee Chairman. This man has been on a mission to undermine the ESA since taking office. In conservation and environmental circles, he is considered an enemy of wildlife and the environment.

The ESA, implemented in 1973, is a symbol of our nation's commitment to the conservation of all animals and plants living in the United States. The ESA is administered collectively by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) and the National Marine Fisheries Services (NMFS). The Secretary of Services oversees the FWS and the Secretary of Services Commerce oversees the NMFS. Together they work to conserve species and protect habitat. The USFWS is responsible for listing, delisting, and reclassifying the species listed under the ESA. The ESA requires that the Secretary's listing decision be made solely based on scientific and commercial data. After data is available, the FWS announces a proposal in the Federal Register, a publication of the U.S. government. The public is then allowed to comment on the proposal for a set period of time. The same is applied when delisting or reclassifying a species. The act also allows the Secretary to designate candidate species that will be considered in the future once resources are available for studies. Delisting occurs when it is apparent the species has recovered enough to no longer need protection under the ESA. A species is proposed for reclassification if the status of the species worsens or improves. The ultimate goal of the ESA

is not simply to prevent extinction, but to return species to healthy populations.

Species are listed as threatened (a species that is likely to be come endangered in the future) or endangered (in danger of extinction in, throughout, or in a significant portion of its range.) The Mojave Desert Tortoise population is threatened.

In September 2005, Congressman Pombo steam-rolled through the U.S. House of Representatives a bill that guts vital provisions of the ESA.H.R. 3824 (see below) and appears to be a payoff to some of Pombo's largest campaign donors, especially large corporate developers. Pombo argues that the best way to conserve natural resources is to give society an economic incentive to protect them by allowing their use rather than barring it. He insists he is improving the species act by making allies of the owners of private property where most endangered species live. Pombo and several brothers live on a 500-acre cattle range in the hills of Tracy, CA where they claim to be restricted by the ESA.

### **How You Can Help**

#### **TAKE ACTION against H.R. 3824 NOW!**

Contact your Congressmen and Congresswomen. Visit these websites: [www.pombointheirpocket.org](http://www.pombointheirpocket.org), [www.savesa.org](http://www.savesa.org) [www.beyonddelay.org](http://www.beyonddelay.org), [www.defenders.org/california/action.html](http://www.defenders.org/california/action.html)

### **Threatened and Endangered Species Recovery Act of 2005 (H.R.3824)**

- Eliminates protection of Critical Habitat
- Makes hard-pressed taxpayers pay developers for not killing endangered wildlife
- Creates a government giveaway for greedy developers
- Provides new loopholes to make it easier to use deadly pesticides
- Threatens our parks, forests, and wildlife refuges
- Allows more oil drilling off the coasts of California, Florida, and the Arctic National Wildlife Refuges
- Guts the landmark National Environmental Policy Act

**Share Your Stories and Ideas**

Do you have a story to share with our readers? Please email stories, care tips, and other ideas of interest to our readers to [kutiger@earthlink.net](mailto:kutiger@earthlink.net).

**Your Email Address**

We think we serve you well if we have your email address. And you help us save paper and postage if you choose to receive the newsletter electronically. But, do you find that you are less apt to read the newsletter online? If so, we would be happy to send you a hard copy instead. Let us know.

Having your email address allows us to send you timely messages, reminders of upcoming meetings and field trips that were announced some time ago in the newsletter, threats to your tortoise or seasonal hints, and, **if you choose**, notice of major conservation issues that will allow you to speak up

and make your position known to decision makers. In return, we ask that you notify us if you change your email address. Otherwise, we call you twice and even write trying to reach you, often without success. Please keep us up to date on your email address. Thank you.

Russell Beck, the silent keeper of the lists

**Private Property Nuisances**

Yes, you can do something about the overgrown weeds or other messes in yards throughout your neighborhood. The campaign to stamp out the epidemic of invasive weeds that is reaching our fragile desert is no petty concern of local agencies. You can help. To report weeds and other messes, call Neighborhood Response: Las Vegas 229-6615, Clark County 455-4191, North Las Vegas 633-1677, Henderson 267-3950, Boulder City 293-5597.

**Tortoise Group Membership Form**

All or part of memberships and contributions should be tax deductible

Name _____	Phone _____	Individual 15.00 _____
Address _____		Family 25.00 _____
City _____	State _____	Sustaining 35.00 _____
	Zip Code _____	Sponsor 50.00 _____
		Corporate 75.00 _____
		Life 200.00 _____

Check one newsletter option      E-mail \_\_\_\_\_

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

**2006 Special Contribution** \_\_\_\_\_

**Total Amount Enclosed** \_\_\_\_\_

Except for Life members, memberships expire each December 31

Skills, Interests \_\_\_\_\_

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

### **Thanks to Our Many New Volunteers**

The response to volunteer opportunities for 2006 has been wonderful. Take a look at our list of Satellite Sellers of MegaDiet. We have added several names and locations. Toni Hoyes has just volunteered to be our Archivist, the person who puts clippings and articles in our book of archives about Tortoise Group, tortoises, and related subjects. We hope that the rest of the more than 1500 of you clip articles from newspapers and magazines and send them to Tortoise Group at 5157 Poncho Circle, LV 89119. Make sure that the source and date are on each article.

We still have several openings. We especially hope to find someone with a talent for fund raising or grant writing, help in choosing program topics and field trip locations, and help in increasing membership. Call Betty to get involved in Tortoise Group.

### **Don't Wait Any Longer to Tag Your Tortoises**

Check out Information Sheet # 5 on our website, [www.tortoisegroup.org](http://www.tortoisegroup.org). You can affix the tag yourself. Or, call Betty, (702)739-8043 and arrange a time to take your tortoise to her for tagging and a microchip if you wish. Learn the tricks to tagging and then you can do your other tortoises. To insert the microchip there is a \$10.00 charge.

### **A Winner of a Website**

One of the best websites is [www.deserttortoise.org](http://www.deserttortoise.org), the Desert Tortoise Council (DTC). Just one of the many informative sections is the abstracts of the papers presented at the Council meeting this February. The abstracts include such subjects as Raven Predation, Wild Tortoise Diet, Translocation, Evaluation of the Status of the desert tortoise in several places throughout its range, Disease in Wild Populations, Weeds and Fires, Upper Respiratory Disease, Head Starting Hatchlings, and more.

**Free!**  
**Yard Consultations**  
**and Tortoise Adoptions**  
**Call 739-8043**

### **Desert Tortoise Conservation Center (DTCC)**

This wonderful tortoise facility in southwestern Las Vegas was established in 1990 after the emergency listing of the Desert Tortoise in 1989. In cooperation with the Bureau of Land Management, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Nevada Department of Wildlife, and other entities, the facility was used primarily for research. Nutritional, reproductive, and behavioral studies were conducted by the Smithsonian Institution National Zoo, the San Diego Zoo, and others. In 1993, Clark County became involved when it was realized that there was an abundance of captive tortoises within the Las Vegas Valley. There needed to be a resolution for the unwanted pets and found tortoises. The County set up a pickup service to bring tortoises to the facility. Approximately 1200 animals enter the facility annually. These tortoises may be used in the adoption program, for research, or be released within the translocation site. At this time, more than 6,000 animals have been released.

By Michelle McDermott



**Desert Tortoise Conservation Center building**  
photo by Michelle McDermott

### **Cost to See Down Your Burrow with Our New Tool, The Snooper** (story on page 1)

Because the equipment and mileage and very expensive, we must charge a fee of \$25 for each visit, and \$.50 per mile if you live out of the Las Vegas metropolitan area.

**Tortoise Group**  
**5157 Poncho Circle**  
**Las Vegas, NV 89119**  
**702-739-8043**

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

*Calendar for 2006*

**May 7**

Field Trip to the Desert Tortoise Conservation Center (DTCC)

**May 20**

A Veterinarian Talks about Tortoise Care

**June 17**

How a Tortoise Works – Habitat Needs and Reproduction

**July 15**

Tortoise Workshop for Kids – Creatures & Crafts

**August 19**

How a Tortoise Works – Hatchlings to Hibernation

**September 16**

Photo Contest, Annual Meeting, and Ice Cream Social

**Please refer to page 3 for program details**

Material submitted to the Tortoise Group  
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