

Tortoise Group Newsletter

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

Hotline: 702-739-7113

Volume XX No. 4 September 2007

www.TortoiseGroup.org

Las Vegas, Nevada

Fall Meeting Schedule

September 15 - Photo Contest, Silent Auction and----Ice Cream Sundaes !!!

When: Saturday, 1 - 3 pm

Where: Nevada State Museum and
Historical Society (in Lorenzi Park)
700 Twin Lakes Drive
(call Kathy, 804-0472 for directions)

Cash prizes, ice cream, laughter, and fun. And it's all about tortoises! Who could ask for more? After a brief annual meeting of the members, the whooplah of the Photo Contest begins while we feast on scrumptious ice cream and toppings. **See complete Photo Contest details on the insert page.**

Tips: Add a catchy or funny caption. Submit only photos showing safe tortoise behavior. A tortoise about to fall or walking down tall steps cannot be considered for a prize.

View Clark County's two fabulous short tortoise DVDs before and after the meeting

October 21 - Tour to the Fabulous Springs Preserve on Sunday, 9:45 am - noon

Celebrate our newest Las Vegas attraction with this specially-priced group tour of the Springs Preserve. It's historical, ecological, and breathtaking! **See insert page for tour details, directions, & signup.**

Registrations must be postmarked by September 30. Be sure to get in on this final Tortoise Group outing of the year. Go on the 1 ½ -hour tour, or stay all day. You can even have lunch at Wolfgang Puck's!

Check out our updated website. Suggestions?
Email Kathy at kutiger@earthlink.net.

How's Our Advertising Campaign?

Have you heard our ads on FM KPLV 93.1, KWNR 95.5, and KSNE 106.5? Have your friends told you they've heard our name on the radio? Please let us know if you think the word is getting out.

We are into our second of three four-week sets of advertising. Our goal is for tortoise owners to know that TortoiseGroup.org has lots of information to make their tortoise's life better, and to promote the use of MegaDiet.

MegaDiet Sales Online

Have you checked our website lately? You can buy MegaDiet and other tortoise and Tortoise Group items at www.tortoisegroup.org. Paid members use a Member Discount Code to receive at least 10% off on all items. A MegaDiet link presents names of Satellite Sellers, Tips on Offering MegaDiet, and answers many questions about how much to offer, when to feed tortoises, and gives links to helpful Information Sheets. Check it out!



Tricky exploring. Photo by Bob Berliner. Visit Tricky's website at <http://TrickyTortoise.com>

MegaDiet Corner

Saving the Day

All of a sudden, we were overwhelmed. Customers' demands for MegaDiet were exceeding our prepared supply. We had to order a second ton and we were not keeping up with the labeling and filling of bags. So, we called upon some unsuspecting but exceptional volunteers who by their individual efforts created an amazing "production line" and met the demands of the public for MegaDiet.

These tasks of labeling and filling bags require a little concentration and a lot of stick-to-it-iveness. Here are those who have it: Reliant Energy's Julie Babcock and her team, Carol Bistrek, Ernestine Hembree, Norm and Jean Maul, Brian and Sandy Morgan, and Derek Tom. Thank you all very much.

Creative Tips on Introducing MegaDiet

- Soften MegaDiet to cookie dough consistency. Try unsweetened apple sauce or liquefied lettuce instead of water
- Grate apple to juicy state to soften MegaDiet. Yum!
- Soften and roll up in a grape leaf, rose petal or other favorite leaf (not lettuce)
- Hollow out half a cherry tomato and fill with softened MegaDiet
- Soften and stud the surface thickly with rose petals or desert willow flowers.
- Go cold turkey. No muss, no fuss.
- Email your tips to Kathy at kutiger@earthlink.net

Remember that these tips are to get your tortoise started on MegaDiet. Later, gradually lessen the apple or juice so your tortoise eats plain MegaDiet.

Moved?

If you adopted a tortoise from Tortoise Group and have moved within the past two years or no longer have your tortoise, please call Betty at 739-8043 to let her know.

What's New?

Have you listened to our Hotline recently, 702-739-7113? We have made it more user-friendly. You do not have to listen to the entire message to receive your answer. Most of the information is for Clark County residents. Try it and let us know. Please call Betty with any comments – 702-739-8043. Please do not leave messages on the Hotline.



Tad enjoys a treat of rose petals. Photo by Jane Hiura.

Link to WILD, the Wildlife Magazine

Teachers and kids: Take a look at the wonderful new online children's publication from the Nevada Department of Wildlife at:
<http://www.ndow.org/learn/programs/region/south/SoNVWild3.pdf>

Good News about Balloons

Aaron Auxier emailed this news to Betty:
 Last night I saw a restaurant let about five helium balloons go into the air when they closed. They have been doing this nightly from what I was able to find out. I called and spoke to the manager and explained how bad that is for the tortoise as well as dogs. She said they will no longer do it!

Kathy Utiger reports that the Summerlin 4th of July Parade no longer releases hundreds of balloons. We're making progress!

All-You-Can-Eat Ice Cream Social

Desert Tortoises on Parade

A photo contest & Ice Cream Social

Date: Saturday, Sept 15

Time: 1:00 – 3 pm

Place: Nevada State
Museum
and Historical
Society
in Lorenzi Park

Our desert tortoises have been awake all summer displaying their mischievous and loving personalities with us humans who share their world.

Now is the time to catch the antics of your desert tortoise in photographs and enter your pet in "Desert Tortoises on Parade."

Judges will present:

Best-In-Shell Prizes

\$50 - Overall winner

\$25 - Each category

Ribbons for Funniest, Most Outlandish, Most Mischievous, and More

Tortoise photos will be judged in five categories; captions are optional (but they're a lot of fun)

1. Tortoise(s) Alone
2. Tortoise(s) with Other Animal(s)
3. Tortoise(s) with People
4. Non-Native Tortoise(s)
5. Tortoises by Kids --- *New category for kids 15 and under*

Rules

- Maximum **TWO ENTRIES** per person/category
- All entries must be submitted by 1:15 pm on September 15 or received by Tortoise Group in the mail by September 14
- Photographs only; do not bring your tortoise to the contest
- **All photographs become the property of Tortoise Group**
- Winners need not be present

Photographs

- Maximum size 8" x 10", black & white or color, glossy or matte
- Mounted on cardboard or in frame with margins no wider than one (1) inch.
- Caption (optional) may be written on bottom margin
- Information written on back: Category; Tortoise's Name, Shell Size, Sex; Photographer's Name, Address, and Phone Number; Owner's Name (if different from Photographer's)

**Banana Splits
Whipped Cream
& Tortoises !!**

Fabulous Springs Preserve Tour

Sunday, October 21

9:45 am - noon

The Springs Preserve is an eco-island, an amazing 180-acre remnant of natural history and habitat surrounded by urban development. This exciting attraction offers a unique cultural experience for everyone: desert living center, colorful desert botanical gardens, museum galleries, live animals, historic photo gallery, walking trails that meander through a scenic wetland habitat, and more. It'll knock your socks off!

Sustainability Tour - 1½-2 hour guided tour

The Springs Preserve exhibits sustainable living in practice and is a resource for greening your lifestyle. Sustainable technologies make the Springs Preserve the largest Platinum LEED-rated commercial building in the southwest. Explore the building materials used to construct the Desert Living Center, a constructed wetland that treats waste water, solar panels in the parking lot, and composting toilets along the trail system. The Sustainable Gallery offers hands-on exhibits at living more sustainably. Green is now a way of life!



Directions

From Valley View Blvd, turn east on Meadows Lane into the Springs Preserve and park in Visitor Parking. Meet at 9:45 am just inside the main entrance - look for the Tortoise Group sign.

Special Group Prices for Members, Family, and Friends

Adults - \$15, Children 5-17 - \$6.50

Remember sunscreen, water, and walking shoes

Springs Preserve Tour Reservation

Name _____ # Adults _____ x \$15.00 = _____

Address _____ # Children _____ x \$6.50 = _____

City _____ ZIP _____ **TOTAL ENCLOSED** _____

Phone _____

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

Reservations Must Be Postmarked
by September 30

Preparation for Winter

- Give a soak in shallow warm water for as long as the tortoise will stay in the container.
- Don't be concerned if the tortoise eats less and less or its food choices seem strange.
- The end of September is a good time to weigh and measure your tortoise for your records. See Information Sheet #11 on our website.
- Plant those perennials for tortoise food now that temperatures are lower and there is still time for root development. See #21 on our list of Information Sheets, www.tortoisegroup.org.

Keeping Awake In Winter Tortoises that Normally Brumate by Betty Burge

When it comes to brumation, the behavior of hatchlings and small juveniles is "plastic." It is relatively easy to fool that tendency if you provide summer conditions: artificial heat, light, and proper UV source of light. As tortoises age, the natural tendency to brumate is so strong that the tortoise will sleep despite heat and light that would stimulate activity in hatchlings and small juveniles.

Why keep hatchlings and small juveniles awake during the first 1-3 winters? People tell me they feel youngsters are better able to handle the outdoor environment if they have eaten and grown through the winter. Not necessary. When fall comes, all my tortoises, including the hatchlings, know what to do: brumate in their burrows.

If your tortoise is being medicated, must be tube fed, has an injury that the vet suggests will heal faster indoors, then those are reason that a tortoise might be kept awake. The problem comes when the tortoise basks under the reflector bulb for several hours but will not eat or drink. Wait a week, and then call the vet for a decision. You will either keep up the summer conditions and learn to tube feed your tortoise, or let your tortoise brumate and hope that the tortoise lives through the winter. The advantages to you and your tortoise of allowing brumation in a burrow over any indoor arrangement are too numerous to recount at this time.

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, I-215 & Far Hills	Kathy & Pauline – 804-0472, 9am – 7pm
Rainbow & Alta	Kellie – 217-7796 (work phone – ask for Kellie)
Charleston & Rancho	Seeking volunteer
Tropicana & Maryland	Betty – 739-8043
Dean Martin & Blue Diamond	Carolyn – 876-0668, ext. 874
Green Valley, Eastern & Windmill	Ed & Pat – 269-7108
Henderson, Lake Mead & Warm Springs	Laurie – 558-6985 (after 11:00 am)
Henderson, Boulder Hwy & Equestrian	Gail – 334-0015 Cell
Boulder City, Utah & Adams	Patty – 293-7263
Pahrump	Sheri – 775-727-5557
Kingman, AZ	Toni – 928-757-8317
Mail 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**

Question Corner **by Betty Burge**

*You may have heard the following questions and their answers many times before. So have we. Lately, they make up almost all the questions other than where to buy MegaDiet. Answers to these questions, and more, can be found on our website, www.tortoisegroup.org, our Hotline, 702-739-7113, and in our free pamphlet, **Desert Tortoises Adoption and Care**, available at all animal hospitals and branches of the public library in Clark County.*

Q. I found a tortoise wandering in the street (Clark County) and another, a little baby tortoise, entered my back yard? What do I do?

A. The Desert Tortoise Conservation Center Pickup Service must be called. It's the law. Their number is 702-593-9027. If you have problems because their mailbox is full, be patient. This is a very busy time of year. If you want to adopt a tortoise you find, it must first go to the Tortoise Center.

Q. My tortoise has escaped. What do I do?

A. After you have asked your neighbors, put up signs, and searched your property thoroughly, call the Desert Tortoise Conservation Center Holding Facility Hotline and leave your message. Someone may have found your tortoise and called the Pickup Service for it. If your tortoise is returned, think about affixing your phone number to the shell as we suggest in Information Sheet #5 and installing a barrier across your gate posts as we suggest in Information Sheet #22. Both Information Sheets are on our website, www.tortoisegroup.org

Q. My tortoise has developed a runny nose. What is it and what do I do about it?

A. Your tortoise has probably contracted Upper Respiratory Tract Disease (URTD), which is thought to be a stress-related disease. It is caused by a virus-like organism, *Mycoplasma*. The organism may be anywhere, and when your tortoise is stressed by one or more factors, resistance is

lowered and the tortoise may contract the disease. Stress may be from long-term nutritional deficiency that may not be obvious to you, crowded conditions in your yard, or a female continually harassed by a courting male. URTD can even be conveyed by contact with a tortoise that is a carrier of URTD but shows no signs. Tortoise Group has a list of local vets who take care of tortoises. The treatment is a series of injections of an antibiotic. Feeding MegaDiet instead of vegetables is recommended as the best nutritional support.

Q. I have several young tortoises of different ages and ten new hatchlings. I cannot find homes for them and have run out of room in my yard. Can you take them?

A. Tortoise Group has no facilities to hold and care for tortoises from the public. The Holding Facility at the local Desert Tortoise Conservation Center will only take your excess young if you part with whatever adults are necessary to stop the breeding. Removing males or the females is necessary unless your yard is large enough to create separate habitats for the sexes. Spaying or neutering is not practical, and these protected animals cannot be euthanized.

We know that it is difficult to give up your special adults that may have been with you for 20 years. Just know that the tortoises will receive good care at the DTCC, and may even be chosen for adoption by Tortoise Group and given to a responsible family. Some have a chance to live in the wild. Over the years biologists have found that these tortoises do just as well after release as the resident wild tortoises, even those raised in captivity!

Certainly life at the DTCC or in the wild is better than taking the young to the office or letting your child take them to school to be given away to unsuspecting people who are instantly captivated by the tortoises but know little about care. Almost all the calls we receive with questions about baby care are from folks who were given the tortoises with little or no information on preparation of habitat or day-to-day care.

Dr. K's Kolumn

By Christine Kolmstetter, DVM
Cheyenne West Animal Hospital

Today let's discuss how you can prepare your tortoise for a safe and problem-free upcoming hibernation. First and foremost, this part of the country is native habitat for desert tortoises so they should absolutely be allowed to hibernate outdoors, not indoors in an aquarium or closet or garage. There are occasions when a sick or otherwise-debilitated tortoise needs to be maintained indoors under appropriate conditions during the hibernation months in order to receive medications or other medical care. However, a healthy tortoise should hibernate outdoors with access to an appropriate burrow. If you have multiple tortoises, be certain that each has an adequate burrow available.

This time of year is often referred to as 'monsoon season' in Las Vegas because of occasional torrential rains. These rains can often flood backyard tortoise burrows, so it is important to inspect these burrows during hibernation to ensure that there are no areas of standing water within the burrow and that deeper areas of the burrow have not collapsed. Excessive water from backyard sprinklers and leaking swimming pools can also cause problems for tortoise burrows, so take a careful look around the yard! Desert tortoises can develop serious health problems if hibernation conditions are inadequate.

It is important to monitor your tortoise carefully during the weeks prior to hibernation. Do the forelegs seem thin? Do the eyes seem sunken or moist? Are the eyelids red or swollen? Is there drainage or bubbles coming from the nostrils? If you answered yes to any of the above questions, your tortoise is exhibiting signs of illness and should be examined by an experienced tortoise veterinarian.

Other questions to ask yourself about your tortoise: Has his/her appetite been good throughout the summer and fall? Have you seen an appropriate amount of tortoise droppings in the yard? Are there any unusual changes in the shell? Do the feet look normal? If you have a female that has laid eggs, did you notice how many eggs she laid? Did she appear to have any problems laying eggs? If the eggs hatched, where are the youngsters? Are the youngsters having any problems?

Does the adult female seem unusually heavy when you pick her up? Perhaps she has retained eggs that she was for some reason unable to lay, or perhaps she has a large bladder stone which sometimes can develop in both female and male tortoises. Is there any tissue protruding from her backside? If so, this is abnormal and may indicate that she has prolapsed during her egg-laying efforts, or that she has other problems. Tissue protruding from the back end of any tortoise may be abnormal and may require veterinary attention if it is a true prolapse wherein the tortoise is unable to retract the tissue. However, a male may occasionally express his penis, usually momentarily. It seems to be a normal act.



What's this? A tortoise penis! If you're lucky you may see the penis before it slips back inside, usually you can get the camera.

Tortoises that are allowed to go into hibernation with health problems can die during hibernation, or emerge from hibernation with life-threatening illnesses. A veterinary examination several weeks prior to hibernation is extremely useful in determining if potential problems exist. As discussed in previous columns, tortoises sometimes have significant health issues which require diagnostics such as radiographs (x-rays) or bloodwork. Radiographs are particularly useful because they can detect problems such as retained eggs or bladder stones. Bloodwork allows us to determine if perhaps the tortoise has an infection, is anemic, or has kidney or liver problems.

So remember to inspect the backyard and tortoise burrow and be vigilant about any changes in your tortoise over the next several months. Hibernation time isn't very far away!

Brumation by Betty Burge

What is that? You may hear the term more and more, especially if you have children in the local elementary schools. We put a bug in Mojave Max's ear, and children have started to correct their parents when they refer to winter sleep of tortoises as hibernation. Technically, the term hibernation from the Latin *hibernus* pertains to winter and is reserved for warm-blooded creatures like birds and mammals.

So, who came up with brumation? What is it? How is it different from hibernation? The Latin *bruma* refers to the winter solstice – hence, winter. Reptile authority Dr. William W. Mayhew proposed the word “brumation” to indicate winter dormancy in ectothermic vertebrates that demonstrate physiological changes that are independent of body temperature. An ectothermic animal is one that receives the heat it needs to raise its body temperature from outside the body, such as heat of the sun directly on the body. A certain level of warmth is needed to support movement, digestion, and other functions.

A vertebrate is an animal that has a backbone. Tortoises are both ectotherms and vertebrates. They will go to sleep in the winter and the pulse rate and respirations may dip as low as four per minute. The minimum body temperature will be between about 52 and 59 degrees Fahrenheit. That is an adaptation that saves energy when food is sparse and ambient temperatures are too low to warm reptiles, frogs, and toads to support activity.

How does brumation work? We still don't know, but in these brumators there seems to be an internal clock that is a major part of what directs the onset of winter torpor and the awakening. Perhaps you have noticed that your tortoise has become very lethargic, spending more and more time in its burrow. It may have actually stopped coming out and it is only the end of September with many warm days to come! The same irregularity occurs in the spring: the tortoise may wake up near the end of February or maybe not until late April. Yes, it is more than ambient temperature or the amount of

sunshine in 24 hours that causes the tortoise to emerge. If all tortoises emerged within one certain week or it was the same date for a given tortoise each year, local school children would not have so much fun picking the date and time that Mojave Max first emerges at the Red Rock Visitors Center.

What is important for you as a caregiver of tortoises is how to prevent certain winter problems that occur mainly in captive situations. For desert dwellers such as your desert tortoises, the burrow is the best place to spend the winter. However, flooding may occur. One very important job is to be on the lookout to prevent drowning.

If hatchlings and small juveniles are spending the winter indoors, providing enough humidity is a very important job. In their outdoor burrows the humidity would be sufficient. Indoors, a lid of water in the corner of the cardboard box should help to prevent dehydration and possible death that is so common among small tortoises kept indoors.

Don't Miss the September Silent Auction.

It's not too late to donate nice items, tortoise or not. Call Betty at 702-739-8043.

Lost Memberships

We know how one year slips into the next when it comes to memberships, and it seems that membership numbers are down this year. The difference from 2006 is significant; more than 60 of you neither renewed nor became Life members. It is your memberships that help to keep the printed information and Website coming your way.

Ernestine Hembree of our Membership Committee conscientiously sends each new and renewing regular member a card for the year. Check the date at the bottom. Unless you are a Life member, the card should have Dec 31, 2007 as the expiration date. If it doesn't, use the convenient form in this newsletter and help us to continue to serve you. Call Betty Burge at 702-739-8043 or email tortoisegroup@att.net if you are unsure or need a new card.

Reliant Energy's Generosity

Reliant Energy, Tortoise Group's corporate sponsor, has donated another \$4000. That's \$9000 for this year to help with our huge educational effort. Thank you Reliant Energy!

Lost emails

Some of you reading this newsletter on paper may not realize that our emails are not getting to you. If you have changed your email address in the last year, or if you are going to change, for example from Earthlink to Embarq, please add tortoisegroup@att.net to the list to receive notice of your change. We have lost over 45 of you to whom we have sent emails and they have come back as "undeliverable." Help us stay in touch.

Burrow Alert Instrument

Do you often wonder if your tortoise has come out? Don't want to miss those precious moments with your tortoise?

Bob Berliner, Tricky's owner (see photo on page 1), has developed a burrow alert system using inexpensive parts from Radio Shack or Fry's. Bob has generously posted the instructions for making the system on Tricky's website at <http://TrickyTortoise.com/Alert>. Thanks, Bob.

MegaDiet delivery person needed to keep 3 vets and some Satellite Sellers stocked. Can you help? Call Betty at 702-739-8043.

If a burrow is flooded, remove the tortoise, put it in a box in a cold place (35-50 degrees F), and it will return to sleep. See Information Sheet #15 at www.tortoisegroup.org.

----- Cut Here -----

Tortoise Group Membership Form

A portion of memberships and contributions *should* be tax deductible
Memberships are individual. They expire each December 31

1. Please Print the COMPLETE address

Name (one name only please)

Phone

Address

City

State

Zip Code

E-mail

2. Check One Newsletter Option

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

3. Renewing Member New Member

() \$15 () \$25 () \$35 () \$50 () \$75 () Life \$500

Special Contribution: _____

10% discount on MegaDiet and other Tortoise Group goodies to members and their immediate families

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

Tortoise Group
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Las Vegas, NV 89119
702-739-8043

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The Tortoise Group newsletter is
now published four times yearly:
March, May, July, and September

Calendar for 2007

September 15 - Photo Contest, Silent Auction, Ice Cream Sundaes
Very very brief annual meeting followed by the exciting Photo Contest
and Silent Auction. Ice cream sundaes for all.

October 21, - Springs Preserve Tour - Sunday, 9:45 am-noon
Guided 1 1/2 hour tour of the fabulous new Las Vegas attraction for
Tortoise Group family members and friends. Special price. Look for
details and sign-up on the insert page.

Find program details on page 1 and on the insert page

Material submitted to the Tortoise Group
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