

# Tortoise Group Newsletter

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

Hotline: 702-739-7113

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

Las Vegas, Nevada

## Lost Tortoises --- the Heartbreak and the Solution

### The Heartbreak

“We’ve looked everywhere, put up signs, but nothing! We’re devastated! How did she get out?” These are the stories we hear day after day.

### The Solution ---Tag Your Tortoise

#### Lost Tortoise Prevention Workshop

July 26, Saturday, 9:30-10:30

Nevada State Museum and Historical Society

Cost: \$10.00

1. Spend about one hour learning how to apply a small label with your phone number on your tortoise. Sound easy? We’ll practice using epoxy and labels and give you several tips. It’s not hard but it takes a bit of practice.
2. Take home your very own Lost Tortoise Prevention Kit containing everything you need for tortoise tagging all your tortoises.
3. Never worry again that your tortoise won’t be recognized. Your phone number will be right on your tortoise’s back – see image below.

Call or email Kathy [kutiger@embarqmail.com](mailto:kutiger@embarqmail.com) at 702-804-0472 to reserve your spot  
Reservations required; minimum 15 people



## Just the Right Tortoise Name

By Glenace and Mark Melton

We sent an email to numerous friends explaining that we were about to adopt a pet tortoise and gave them a chance to submit names. We received quite a few but none to our liking. The book, *Southern Paiute Legends, Lore, Language and Lineage*, by LaVan Martineau, 1992, was more helpful and gave this information:

Turtle, Desert Tortoise, *Gopherus agassizii*, was a favorite among the Shivwits, Moapa, and Las Vegas bands. They called the tortoise:

1. aiyu’ and 2. pekai (pronounced “péek eye”)



Princess Pekai tempted from her burrow with a rose

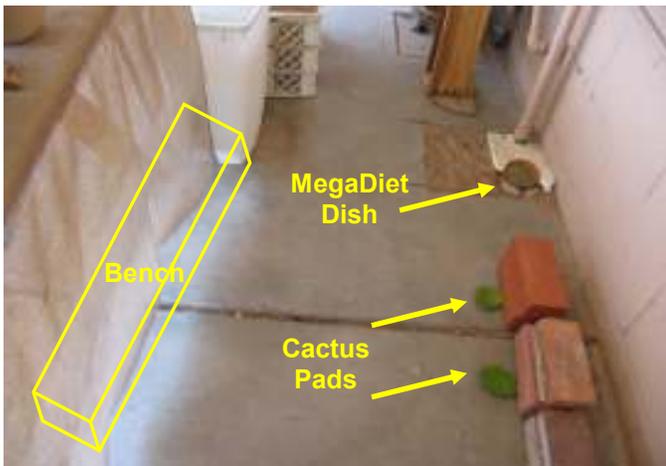
We thought that Pekai would be fitting to match the Paiute name in the area. We have since added Princess to her name to match her actions. Her favorite haunt in the yard is still the hollyhock patch, but she also likes to sit just inside the berm under the ledge of her burrow entrance and contemplate the neighbors’ bright yellow and orange bird-of-paradise flowers that stand just beyond the block wall between our yards. As you can tell, we enjoy our precious tortoise immensely. She was worth the effort.

## MegaDiet Corner

### Protecting MegaDiet from Birds

By Betty Burge

Have birds found the MegaDiet pellets? The arrangement below might work for you, especially if you change the dish location. My MegaDiet dish countersunk in Styrofoam sits against a west-facing wall. Shadecloth suspended from a 6-foot picnic table to the floor about three feet from the wall makes a blind. I hold down the cloth with various pots. Note baskets and other items that extend the barrier against the sun. The cloth hangs between the table and bench (removed for photo) to prevent the cloth from blowing up and exposing the MegaDiet.



Arrangement protects MegaDiet pellets from birds

### Creative Tips on Introducing MegaDiet

- Soften MegaDiet to cookie dough consistency. Try unsweetened apple juice, apple sauce, or liquefied lettuce instead of water
- Grate apple to juicy state to soften MegaDiet.
- Soften and roll up MegaDiet in a grape leaf, rose petal or other favorite leaf (not lettuce)
- Soften MegaDiet 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@embarqmail.com](mailto:kutiger@embarqmail.com)

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.

### MegaDiet Satellite Sellers

Please call sellers for appointment

Nellis & Owens	Georgi – 459-1274
Decatur & Gowan	Toni – 277-6179
215 & Lone Mtn	Lynn – 655-5698
215 & Far Hills	Kathy & Pauline – 804-0472, 9am – 7pm
215 & W. Tropicana	Athena – 891-8585
Rainbow & Alta	Kellie – 353-5513
Tropicana & Maryland	Betty – 739-8043
Dean Martin & Blue Diamond	Carolyn – 876-0668, ext. 874
Silverado Ranch & S. Maryland Pkwy	Helene – 878-7877
Boulder Hwy & Equestrian	Gail – 334-0015 Cell
Warm Springs & Lake Mead (Henderson)	Gay – 563-1924
Pahrump	Sheri – 775-727-5557
Kingman, AZ	Toni – 928-757-8317

OnLine Store at:

<http://www.tortoisegroup.org/sales/intoshop.php>

No computer? Don't use a credit card?

Call Susan – 702-458-8382

A 1½ lb bag costing \$8.00 (\$12.00 for non-members) lasts a large desert tortoise about one month. MegaDiet is also sold at Tortoise Group meetings.

### MegaDiet Sellers Needed

- Camino al Norte & Ann Road
  - Green Valley
  - Anthem
- Call Betty at 739-8043 to learn more**

## Summer Events

Nevada State Museum  
& Historical Society

700 Twin Lakes Drive (in Lorenzi Park)

1 – 3 pm

Call Kathy at 804-0472 for directions

### July 19, Saturday, 1 to 3 pm Developing Hannah's Paradise by Linda Parker, new tortoise owner and Jerry Shupe, TG Consultant

Linda and Jerry worked hand-in-hand proposing and rejecting ideas, planning and digging, to come up with Hannah's perfect new habitat. Journey with Linda and Jerry in fabulous pictures and stories. Eco-gardener Linda even reveals her natural planting methods. Come get some new ideas for your yard!

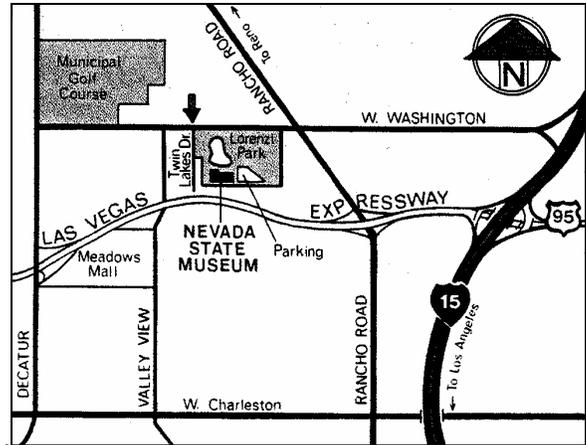
### July 26, Saturday, 9:30 to 10:30 Lost Tortoise Prevention Workshop

Please turn to page 1 for the details on this extremely important workshop on how to tag your tortoise. Make your reservation today. If your tortoise escapes, your phone number will be right on your tortoise's back.

### August 16, Saturday, 1 to 3 pm Amargosa River Project – from Beatty to Badwater

By Jim Moore, M.S.  
The Nature Conservancy

Mojave Desert Ecologist with The Nature Conservancy, Jim Moore describes his current project to protect private land in Nevada, keep water in the system, and abate threats to aquatic systems and desert tortoise habitat. This is a great opportunity to learn about efforts to protect Nevada's resources – bring all your questions to this very knowledgeable man.



## More on Dandelions

By Kathy Utiger

Last fall I transplanted dandelion plants into my lawn and Tad's salad bar. This spring my plants produced luscious flowers that Tad located quickly each morning. I'm letting them volunteer in various spots all over the yard. I don't know why I waited so long to plant them! To transplant successfully see Information Sheet #13

<http://www.tortoisegroup.org/infosheet13.html>

## Drowning – Best to Be Prepared

George, the tortoise, fell in the fish pond and drowned. Resuscitation attempts did not work; neither did a trip to the vet. George had lived with the family for 81 years, the last 11 at the home with the fish pond, during which time he ignored it.

After the tragedy, the owner found our website and Information Sheet # 25, *Treatment of Drowning in Tortoises*. Could George have been saved if the owner had known about the treatment before the fall in the pond? Who knows? It pays to read up on tortoise conditions and problems.

At meetings, you can pick up our 27 plus Information Sheets or check our website at <http://www.tortoisegroup.org/infosheets.html> This information is in addition to what is in our booklet, *Desert Tortoises, Adoption and Care*. If you do not have access to our website send your request with a self addressed stamped envelope to Tortoise Group, 5157 Poncho Circle, Las Vegas, NV 89119.

## Question Corner

by Betty Burge

*Answers to FAQs can be found on our website, [www.tortoisegroup.org](http://www.tortoisegroup.org), our Hotline, 702-739-7113, and in our free booklet, **Desert Tortoises Adoption and Care**, available at all animal hospitals and branches of the public library in Clark County.*

**Q.** The most questions this month are from persons who have found tortoises wandering in their neighborhood. What should they do?

**A.** Do not keep them. They must be turned in to the Tortoise Holding Facility at the Desert Tortoise Conservation Center. Not only may the owners be looking for them; it's the law. Call 593-9037. After the tortoise has passed its health check and the owner has had several days to call the Holding Facility to check if the tortoise is there, the tortoise should be available for adoption. If you want to adopt that tortoise, you will work through Tortoise Group to prepare a habitat that is as escape-proof as you possible. When your yard is ready, we will adopt that tortoise to you if at all possible.

Also to be turned in are tortoises from development sites. Every developer who gets the permit to develop is given a flier on what to do when wild tortoise is found. That information is to be passed along to all workers on that property. Wild tortoises will certainly be released to a different wild area.

**Q.** The second most frequent question is what to do when you have lost a tortoise. It may have been stolen but very likely it has escaped under fencing or through a gate where no barrier was in place. No one with whom I have spoken this month or any month this season has any ID, such as a phone number, on the shell. Even an honest person cannot return it when there is no connection with you.

**A.** You can ask up and down your street, put up a poster, or call the Holding Facility at the Desert Tortoise Conservation Center, 593-9027. It may be there, and you may be able to identify and take your tortoise home.

The best thing you can do now is ID your tortoise. If you have access to the Tortoise Group website, click <http://www.tortoisegroup.org/infosheet05.html> for Information Sheet #5, Marking Your Tortoise. With a little practice you can affix a harmless self-stick tag with your phone number and cover it carefully with a little 5-minute epoxy.

If you do not have access to our website, send us a self addressed, stamped envelope and we will mail a copy of #5 to you.

**Best Solution: Attend the Lost Tortoise Prevention Workshop described on page 1.**

## Kudos from Our Mail Box

Dear Betty,

Do we get a prize for taking the longest to complete our yard? The first burrow had water problems. It was flooded during a heavy rain before it was even completed. The second attempted burrow solved the water problem but due to soil conditions – friable, non-cohesive fill that the builders had used – sifted into the burrow. To solve this problem we dug up the area for the third time, down to the firm, underlying boulder-clay, and boxed in the top and sides of the tortoise turn-around area. This has solved the soil and water problems, but we check frequently to make sure everything remains safe. We certainly can't thank Jerry Shupe enough for her help and guidance during this period.

Thank you for your dedicated work in helping to preserve the desert tortoise and its habitat.

Sincerely,

Glenace and Mark Melton

### **July 19 Meeting: Habitat Development**

Don't miss hearing how another member, Linda Parker, developed her yard with the help of Habitat Specialist, Jerry Shupe.

## Dr. K's Kolumn

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

One of the problems often encountered in desert tortoises during this time of year is shell trauma. Such injuries can occur when the tortoise escapes out of its backyard environment and wanders into traffic. Unfortunately, these injuries by cars are often fatal when they result in completely crushed shells. Shell trauma can also occur from being bitten by a dog or being stepped on or kicked by a horse. Sometimes owners are shoveling in the backyard or drilling through patio concrete, unaware that the tortoise has burrowed below, and these activities can result in devastating injuries. A tortoise that is dropped onto a hard surface such as concrete or tile can suffer significant trauma.

Tortoises, especially the larger males, can be very inquisitive and are often determined to escape from the safety of their backyard. In the process of doing so, they can manage to get themselves stuck under gates or other barriers. Other backyard dangers include large rocks or boulders which can potentially collapse onto a tortoise.

The degree of trauma from the above scenarios can vary from minor and treatable to immediately fatal. Significant blood loss, shock and irreparable damage to internal organs can occur with deep penetrating shell wounds and severe crush injuries. Unfortunately, in such extreme cases of shell trauma, euthanasia is the most humane decision for these animals. In most situations, however, with hospitalization and supportive care, and sometimes surgical shell repair, these injured tortoises can heal and return to a very good quality of life. It is extremely important when these injuries occur that the tortoise be evaluated by a reptile veterinarian in order that issues of shock, pain and degree of blood loss be assessed. Initial veterinary treatment typically includes medication for pain management, minimizing any ongoing blood loss, gentle wound cleaning and bandaging, fluids, antibiotics, and hospitalization in a warmed ICU cage. Although severe cases of shell trauma may eventually require anesthesia and surgical shell repair with orthopedic wires or screws, these injured tortoises are not good anesthesia candidates, and

such shell repair procedures must often be postponed for several days to weeks until the tortoise is more stable.

The depth of shell injuries and degree of underlying internal organ damage can often be difficult to evaluate, especially with penetrating wounds such as from dog bites. For this reason, immediate sealing of shell trauma with dental acrylics or other plastic sealants is inappropriate. Although the shell can potentially be 'glued back together' with such methods, life threatening shell and soft tissue infections can develop over weeks to months underneath such sealants. Rather than seal such shell injuries immediately, it is preferable to gently cleanse and bandage the damaged shell areas daily until fibrous scar tissue begins to form around the shell injuries, a healing process which can take weeks to months or longer depending on the severity of shell injury. Once the tortoise is stabilized in the hospital for several days, diligent home care and bandage changes and administration of antibiotics can be done by the owner. Animals with more severe injuries may require further hospitalization. When the animal becomes stronger and soft tissue wounds have been repeatedly cleansed and are beginning to heal, we can consider application of acrylics or surgical repair of shell wounds.

An important and sometimes frustrating fact about tortoises is that healing occurs very slowly, particularly with shell injuries. If your tortoise has been hospitalized from trauma wounds, be patient! It is very likely that you will need to continue home care for several weeks or even months until your friend is back to health. Your reptile veterinarian will demonstrate how to perform bandage changes and administer medications at home. Tortoises in the process of healing may need to be housed indoors and any open wound kept away from flies. It is extremely important that the indoor environmental temperature, lighting, and diet be appropriate. Again, your reptile veterinarian will provide guidance for your particular situation.

Of course, the best solution for shell injuries is prevention! Examine your backyard throughout the summer for possible dangers, and take a good look at your tortoises when they are out wandering around to make sure that they are eating and acting normally.

## Egg Laying Season Is Not Over!

By Betty Burge

You may have seen your female laying her first clutch of eggs in May. And by the third week in July, a second or third clutch may be laid. Turtles and tortoises store sperms, so even if your female has not mated recently she may lay fertile eggs for several years.

If you are interested in raising some young, we hope that that you have lots of room and you make burrows for several hatchlings before hatching time. The Tortoise Pickup Service for the tortoise Holding Facility will take the babies if you have removed or separated your male, permanently. Otherwise, they won't. Crowding, stress, and disease often result from uncontrolled breeding. If you plan to give away the hatchlings, provide the adopter with a copy of our booklet, *Desert Tortoises, Adoption and Care*, and wait until the new home is ready before giving them away.

Soon, we hope to write up an information sheet about how to move eggs, especially if they have been laid in the "wrong" place. This allows you to move eggs directly to the hatchling pen. When they hatch in August and September, the young will have burrows for protection from the heat and will not become "lost" in your yard or escape. **If you plan to keep the hatchlings, build a pen now.** Before letting the yearlings into the yard next spring, check the yard for ways they might escape. Hatchlings and small juveniles are amazing escape artists.

### Expecting Hatchlings? Prepare now!

Betty has the special roof tiles you need for burrows @ only \$3.50 each. Call 702-739-8043

If you don't move the eggs to a baby pen, mark the area of the nest with four upright sticks because you may forget the location of the nest if it is not just inside or just outside the burrow. You don't want to confine hatchlings to the nest site without access to underground burrows. You probably won't be at the nest to move them when they surface and they could die of overheating if confined to the nest area

without a deep burrow. They will know to run for cover after hatching.

You need to make burrows in several places throughout the yard for these little ones, burrows that just fit them. Snugginess is essential for keeping the burrow sufficiently cool. If little burrows are not available immediately, the young will go into the adult burrows and are very likely to be inadvertently crushed by an adult. Look under Reproduction in our booklet, *Desert Tortoises, Adoption and Care* [http://www.tortoisegroup.org/sales/onlinepdf\\_20.html](http://www.tortoisegroup.org/sales/onlinepdf_20.html) and also Information Sheet #14 for directions to install burrows for hatchlings and small juveniles.

## Tortoise Salad Bar

Mark Melton has designed a wonderful device to help Princess Pekai (péek eye) pull bites off plants as if they were attached to the ground.



### Princess Pekai enjoying dandelion greens and double hollyhocks

After Pekai finishes her MegaDiet, she loves munching at the salad bar that Mark designed for her. Two bricks stacked with a board of clips attached hold the flowers or greens securely in place. Two bricks are stacked (15x7x1.5 size brick) which makes a good height for our tortoise. Two concrete screws were used to hold the board with the clips in place.

### Jerry Shupe, Habitat Specialist

New phone #: 349-9194

## Annual Meeting in September

The Nominating Committee presented the following slate of officers to the Board for election: Chairman, Betty Burge; Vice-Chairman, Kathy Utiger; Secretary, Christine Bergman; and Treasurer, Trilla Newton. A brief members' meeting will precede the program. Members may bring up any topics for discussion and present candidates from the floor.

## Global Warming

The following is a large comprehensive site that you can probably trust. You have the option of exploring the subject as deeply as you wish. Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change Website at <http://www.ipcc.ch/>

## Missing the news? Missing your updates from us?

We've lost more than 50 of you. Please remember to send us your new physical and email addresses.

## Thunder Books for Kids

Thunder, an amiable tortoise, stars in a trilogy of adventures in which he is driven from the desert by humans, negotiates disastrous situations, escapes from humans, has many exciting times, and eventually becomes a father. Three wonderful Thunder books are available from Tortoise Group at <http://www.tortoisegroup.org/sales/intoshop.php>

## Microchip Implantation

Besides putting a physical label on your tortoise, another method of identifying your tortoise is to have a chip implanted. Refer to Information Sheet #24 <http://www.tortoisegroup.org/infosheet24.html>. Those vets marked with an asterisk implant chips.

**Please send stories and photos to [kutiger@embarqmail.com](mailto:kutiger@embarqmail.com) (new address)**

----- 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      2008

- 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: \_\_\_\_\_

33% discount on MegaDiet and 10% on 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**  
**5157 Poncho Circle**  
**Las Vegas, NV 89119**  
**702-739-8043**

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

**Editor** Kathy Utiger

**Board of Directors**

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Chairman Betty Burge  
Vice-Chairman Kathy Utiger  
Secretary Christine Bergman  
Treasurer Trilla Newton

**Members**

Laura Deitsch, Wende Lestelle,  
Susan Stater

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

**Calendar for 2008**

**July 19 “Developing Hannah’s Paradise”**

**July 26 Lost Tortoise Prevention Workshop**

**August 16 “Amargosa River Project – Beatty to Badwater”**

**September 20 “Taking Great Tortoise Pictures,” Photo  
Contest, Annual Meeting, Silent Auction**

**October 18 Field Trip to the CSN Plant Propagation Site in  
Henderson**

**Details & contact information on pages 1 and 3**

Material submitted to the Tortoise Group  
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may be edited before printing.

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