



# newsletter

Volume: XXII  
No : 1  
March 2009  
Las Vegas, NV

Improving the lives of wild and pet desert tortoises through education.  
A non-profit organization since 1982

Hotline: 702-739-7113  
www.TortoiseGroup.org

## Like the New Logo?

The board worked with Sharon Shafer of skydancestudio.com/ for several months to create a simple, elegant tortoise. Here is Sharon's version.



Then we asked for help with implementing the logo on t-shirts, display material, letterhead and so on. To

our great delight, Amy Levitus, Clay Nicholas, Jessica Carroll, and Carol Ferranti attended a meeting with board members Laura Deitsch and Kathy Utiger where ideas flowed. Clay took on creating the letterhead you received recently, while the other jumped in to take on other jobs. What a crew.

Clay Nicholas of Clay Nicholas Design www.CNDiv.com/ took Sharon's tortoise and gave it the fabulous

woodcut look and designed an attractive letterhead to complement it.



Hope you like it!



## How Lucky We Are! By Betty Burge

Recently I received a newsletter from an organization similar to Tortoise Group. Although they deal with many kinds of reptiles and amphibians and are not within the natural range of the Mojave Desert Tortoise, they are having problems reminiscent of some of the problems we had years ago. I thought how lucky we are.

Until the Mojave population of the Desert Tortoise, *Gopherus agassizii*, was given protected status on the federal list of Threatened and Endangered Species in August 1989, no one in local or Nevada state government took any action to do what was needed for the 1)hundreds of unwanted tortoises, 2) tortoises found wandering the streets, 3) and most of all, the wild tortoises being unnecessarily poached because there was no easy, legal, and organized way to secure a pet tortoise. Sneaking a pet tortoise to another person or poaching from the desert was the rule. Frequently, the local media publicized the tortoises' status of protection in Nevada. Without a permit the tortoise could be confiscated by the Nevada Department of Wildlife (NDOW). As a result

of the publicity, tens to hundreds were turned in by the public out of fear of confiscation and penalties.

However, there was no money to build a holding facility or manage a captive program. No way for Tortoise Group to legally hold meetings to inform tortoise owners about better methods of tortoise care for the tortoises that most people were just feeding lettuce and keeping without a permit. This would be like providing information on how to grow better marijuana or transfer stolen goods more easily. But we picked up the slack as best we could.

For 10 years, until 1983, those concerned members of the public who became the core of Tortoise Group wrote letters and met frequently with NDOW staff attempting to have them change the state laws and "grandfather in" already captive tortoises and, as a conservation effort, offer adoption as an alternative to poaching. In the meantime we worked, as best we

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## How Lucky We Are! continued from pg1

could, housing tortoises in our yards because the NDOW could not. We were extensions of the NDOW "holding area."



Winner in the 2008 Photo Contest Other Photos. "Sharing" with hatchlings by Ed and Patsy Maestri. It

was another six years until the federal government listed the tortoise, which was really a belated admission that the tortoise was in enough trouble to start crisis management. Biologists studying the tortoises had seen the writing on the wall for years.

And still the builders and local governments tried to sue the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service for their ruling. When they lost, funds were available to build the Desert Tortoise Conservation Center and Holding Facility. A Desert Conservation Program was created and funds were generated to pay biologists to get into the field and evaluate the status of the tortoise and its habitat, plan and implement solutions for recovery, and monitor effects of those attempts.

The bottom line is that now wild tortoises and their habi-

## Join a Pre-adoption Team

Betty Burge and Jerry Shupe desperately need several apprentices to join them as they visit yards of prospective adopters. Betty visits in the southern part of the valley mainly from Boulder City to Charleston Blvd; Jerry Shupe, north of Charleston. Any one of you may not be available each time there is a yard visit, but hopefully there will be others on the teams who can.

tat are protected to different degrees in what we hope are sufficiently large areas to ensure the continuation of not only wild desert tortoises but hundreds of other species that share that desert and make it a self-sustaining whole.

How lucky we are that now we can call the Tortoise Rescue Service to pick up a tortoise wandering in a developed area or an unwanted pet and know that the tortoise will be well taken care of at the Holding Facility of the Desert Tortoise Conservation Center. Tortoises are held until programs authorized by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service for placement can be carried out such as adoption, release to live in the wild, or becoming part of controlled and humane studies planned to benefit wild tortoises and also captive tortoises.

How lucky we are to have these support services for you and the tortoises. With what you have learned from Tortoise Group, you can offer a great deal in your everyday conversations. You should have a greater understanding of the fragile nature of a desert habitat before you go there for recreation. You may be in a position to stop the unauthorized release of a pet tortoise into wild desert, a tortoise that may be carrying Upper Respiratory Tract Disease. You can refer those people to the free Tortoise Rescue Service. There are indirect ways to help all tortoises through the Tortoise Group education efforts, especially with children, concepts we teach and a proprietary concern that should help to ensure that we have a tortoise-filled desert to enjoy and that the wildlife there is secure.

We suggest the location for the burrow and go over the preparations that need to be done in advance of adoption. Every yard is different, so the visits are always a creative challenge. For more information, call or email Betty at 739-8043, [tortoisegroup@att.net](mailto:tortoisegroup@att.net).



## Question Corner by Betty Burge

**Question:** Every year in late winter I dig up and discard mustard plants that I know my tortoise will not eat and every year there are more. After a rainy winter the number is even greater. What can I do to stop these weeds that seem to be taking over?

**Answer:** You are probably battling Tumble-Mustard, *Sisymbrium altissimum*. You can reduce the number of mustard plants dramatically if you start as soon as they show their leaves. Keep a gallon can and an old steak knife within reach and take it with you every time you cruise your yard for any reason, starting by mid-February. Keep your eyes open for these weeds and try to dig them up by the roots before you see the flower head with minute yellow blossoms. They will produce a flower

when only a few inches high! Part of the flower's stalk may have gone to seed while other parts are still blooming.



Put them in the can, immediately and gently, head down. Don't use that can for anything that will contact plants you want. If there are signs of flowers or seeds pods on the mustard you dig up, dispose of the plants by wrapping them in newspaper before discarding. Do not compost them unless they are free of flowers or seed pods.

## Newsletter Policy Change

As of 2009, receiving the newsletter in hard copy is a privilege of membership. So unless you have joined for 2009 or are a Life member, this will be your last newsletter in hard copy. Of course the newsletter is available free on our website.

Why the change? The cost of printing and mailing the September newsletter was about \$1000. Of the 1982 people who requested hard copies, only 444 were members, or 22%. The Tortoise Group policy of providing information free to anyone who wants it now excludes the newsletter.

The obvious solution is to become a member to support Tortoise Group and to receive the benefits of membership: 33+% off on MegaDiet and hard copy newsletter if desired!

If you need those special roof tiles, Monier Rake roof tiles, that are just right for the first two or so years, we have made it easy for you to find them. They are not available at many roofing supply stores, so we have purchased a quantity to make it easy for you. You only need two or three per burrow and they cost only \$3.50 each. Call Betty, 739-8043

Desert Garden Center Plant Sale  
Saturday, April 4  
College of Southern Nevada  
6375 W. Charleston Avenue

Although this Center is now closed, they'll be open a few times a year with special tortoise plants available. Grab this special opportunity....

■ If you are expecting hatchlings or have not been giving them an outdoor life, now is the time to build that enclosure for them. They would use your entire yard but a 5 ft x 20 ft pen will do for the first season. Complete directions are in our booklet, Desert Tortoises, Adoption and Care.



Winner in the 2008 Photo Contest Best in Shell. "The early tort gets the sprout" with Maya by Michelle Yiatras.

## MegaDiet Satellite Sellers

Please call sellers for appointment

Nellis & Owens

Decatur & Gowan

215 & Lone Mtn

215 & Far Hills

215 & W. Tropicana

Rainbow & Alta

Dean Martin & Blue Diamond

Tropicana & Maryland

Eastern & Windmill

Silverado Ranch & S. Maryland Pkwy

Boulder Hwy & Equestrian

Warm Springs & Lake Mead (Henderson)

Boulder City

Pahrump

Kingman, AZ

Georgi – 459-1274

Toni – 277-6179

Lynn – 655-5698

Kathy & Pauline – 804-0472,  
9am – 7pm

Athena- 891-8585

Kellie –353-5513

Carolyn – 876-0668, ext. 874

Betty – 739-8043

Patsy – 269-7108

Helene – 878-7877

Gail – 334-0015 Cell

Gay – 563-1924

Carol - 293-6494

Sheri –775-727-5557

Toni – 928-757-8317



Winner in the 2008 Photo Contest Tortoise with Other Animals category. "Mutual Respect" with Marley the cat and Tonka II by Marilyn Benoit.

### MegaDiet Sellers Needed

- Camino al Norte & Ann Rd.
- Charleston and Rancho

Call Betty at 739-8043 for more info.

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 TG meetings.

## MegaDiet Bagging Day

Thanks to the wonderful crew of 48 that assembled at the Nevada State Museum on February 7, we were able to label and bag 1 ½ tons of MegaDiet in just two hours! That MegaDiet is now available from Satellite Sellers around the Las Vegas valley and online.

Gae Joyce

Shari Westerlink

Toni Allen

Bobbi Papadopulo  
and her sister

Dan Cloninger

Jaene Graye

Christine Bergman

Edmee Marcek

Michelle McLemore

Marilyn Walker

Ron Walker

Kimberly Williams

Laura Deitsch

Ray Lantz

Raymond Lantz

Thomas Lantz

Richard Knapp

Betty Burge

Kathy Utiger

Toni Downen

Trilla Newton

Kathleen Rice

Beverly Stewart

Carol Smith

Paul Tullgren

Alice Tullgren

Debbie Forbush

Curt Ashley

Brenda Ashley

Dee Dee Neal

Jeff Neal

Georgi Shalhoob

Jessica Carroll

Cathey Adamson

Austin Adamsen

Carol Thompson

Merrill Larsh

Audrey Larsh

Sue Lyo

June Dolan

Wendell Taguchi

Niwako Taguchi

Susann Stoecklin

Melissa Macias

Diana Rios

Helen Hearne

Matilda

## Non-native Exotic Tortoises- WHY?

Some of the many exotic tortoises (exotic = not native, foreign) are: *Sulcata*, *Herman's*, *Greek*, *Russian*, *Leopard*, *Red-* or *Yellow-footed*.

Buy an exotic if you choose to:

- Pay for a tortoise instead of getting one free from Tortoise Group
- Stimulate the foreign sources that may be taking tortoises from the wild rather than from captive-bred sources.
- Introduce parasites that may have more of a field day with our tortoises than the parasites that normally dwell in and on our tortoises.
- Have a tortoise that must have a warm environment in winter, remain active and eat under typically

short-lived UV lights (even if the proper kind) instead of letting the tortoise sleep through the cold like our native desert tortoise.

- Have a tortoise that could become too large to lift, too destructive in the yard, dangerously bossy with your other tortoises, and just too much to care for.

But if you already have one that you love, they can all benefit from MegaDiet; those from warm, humid places should have misters. When outdoor temperatures permit, your exotics need to be outdoors. Give them the option of moving in and out. For special dietary and housing needs we have specialists to whom we can refer you.

## Join a Pre-adoption Team

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Any one of you may not be available each time there is a yard visit, but hopefully there will be others on the teams who can.

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Winner in the 2008 Photo Contest Tortoise with People. "Royal Pokey" with Pokey by Aaron Smith.

## Dandelions by Kathy Utiger

If you went on the field trip in October to the College of Southern Nevada to the plant propagation site, you know the great lengths Beth Hewitt went to have wonderful plants for us and to put on a great tour. Well, she's done it again! Beth has 96 dandelion plants in 4" containers. These dandelion plants will be sold at the March meeting for \$5 each.

You may know from bitter experience how difficult it is to transplant dandelions. These dandelions will be just right for planting. I have planted several along the edge of my patio along with gazenias, petunias, and filaree to form a tortoise salad bar.

### March Meeting Specials! •

- *Root beer floats*
- *Free tortoise plants*
- *Dandelions for sale*

## SPRING EVENTS

### March 21, Saturday, 1-3 pm

Yard Preparation for Spring: What's a Weed? By Betty Burge

Betty will show us with slides and actual plants which are weeds, beneficial plants, and poisonous plants. She'll also go over the External Physical Health Checklist for Tortoises that we use each spring. Bring all you questions and be sure to come ready to buy some MegaDiet.

Nevada State Museum & Historical Society  
700 Twin Lakes Drive (in Lorenzi Park)  
Call Kathy at 804-0472 for directions

### April 19, Sunday 10 am – noon

Field Trip: Translocation Site to See Tortoises in the Wild

When: Sunday morning

Where to meet: See Directions at right



*Note: This outing is not appropriate for young children*

What makes this area special? For several years the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has authorized the release of tortoises held at the Desert Tortoise Conservation Center. Several thousand tortoises have been released in this 32-square-mile area of public land. Wild resident tortoises are there, too. The tortoises chosen for release from the Center have been successful in adjusting or readjusting to life in the wild.

What will we do? We will park along the road and walk in the desert looking for tortoises and exploring their environment. We will look for burrows and other sign, and share our discoveries. The spring flowers—tortoise food—should be very plentiful and increase our chances of seeing tortoises. There is something very exciting about finding a wild tortoise. Come share that feeling.

What should you bring? Prepare yourself for the sun. Wear a hat and sturdy walking shoes. Slather on the sunscreen and bring plenty of water. Camera, binoculars, and notebook. A walking stick is useful even if you are very fit. If it should be raining and it looks like it won't be clearing, we will not go. Walking on very wet or muddy desert is destructive to habitat.

Directions: Drive south on I-15 toward Los Angeles. The drive from Tropicana Avenue to Jean takes approximately 30 minutes. Exit right at the Jean exit, then turn left at the stop sign and go under the freeway. Proceed 1 block to the gas station on the left. Please be prompt. We will leave some of the cars at the gas station and carpool to the site to reduce the impact of vehicles. The road to the site is just fine for the average sedan.

## The Best Intentions by Francesca Haak

Pebbles is only about six inches, so we wanted to protect him (or her) in his burrow during the cold winter months. First we put a roof tile over the burrow opening so the wind wouldn't blow in. Then we put a big blue tarp over the whole burrow to keep the rain out. "Good," we thought, "Pebbles is safe and dry!"

After receiving the Tortoise Tip about pruning, I spent some time outside pruning the roses in his

habitat. The days were warm, so we took off the tarp. Wow! There was water everywhere! The burrow was flooded! Where was Pebbles? We pulled off the tile and found him right there with bugs crawling all over him. We were sure he was dead. We put him in the sun and called Tortoise Group for help. After a while, he started moving, all except one leg. Betty Burge suggested soaking him in warm water, and after a few minutes he

moved just fine. Whew! We were fortunate to have found him when we did.

Pebbles is now snoozing in a plastic tub in the garage. We are currently trying to find the leak in our yard. No more messing with Mother Nature. We know that Pebbles will be fine in his new burrow with the opening uncovered for easy escape if necessary. And, we'll keep an eye out for any more leaks!



### U.S. Fish and Wildlife Definitions

An Endangered species is in danger of becoming extinct within the foreseeable future throughout all or a substantial portion of its range.

A Threatened species is likely to become Endangered within the foreseeable future throughout all or a substantial portion of its range."

The legal status of the Mojave population of the desert tortoise is Threatened.

### Tortoise Group Membership Form

Memberships and contributions may be tax deductible

#### 1. Please Print the COMPLETE address

First Name	Last Name	Phone
Address		
City	State	Zip Code
E-mail		

#### 2. Check One Newsletter Option 2009

- Send my newsletter by e-mail
- Send my newsletter in hard copy

#### 3. Check amount for your 1-year membership

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

Special Project Funding  
Contribution: \_\_\_\_\_ **TOTAL** \_\_\_\_\_

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 ♦ 1001 Adobe Flat ♦ Henderson, NV 89011**

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



Thank you to Sharon Schafer of [www.skydancestudio](http://www.skydancestudio) and Clay Nicholas of Clay Nicholas Design [www.CNDlv.com/](http://www.CNDlv.com/) for the new logo.



Thank you to Amy Levitus of Avant Garde Design for our fresh new look. [www.agdesignlv.com](http://www.agdesignlv.com)

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