

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 XXIII No. 3 August 2010

www.TortoiseGroup.org

Las Vegas, Nevada

A New Tortoise Group Is Emerging

The July meeting to renew Tortoise Group brought many people eager to volunteer their ideas and their talent. Projects are bursting forth and committees are taking shape. Volunteers have already jumped in to start. So where will you fit in?

Although we have a strategy, lots of planning remains. People who missed the meeting have assured me that they'll be at the next one. And if not? There will still be plenty of opportunity to add your ingenuity in the coming months.

The August meeting will continue the same effort, refining and reworking. Watch for it! The September meeting will bring the unveiling of the New Tortoise Group!



From hatchling to grownup

Hatchling Season

If you have a mating pair of desert tortoises, be prepared for hatchlings to arrive from late August through September. Since it is not legal to give tortoises to another person, please call the Pet Desert Tortoise Hotline at 702-488-9422 to pick up the hatchlings and take them to the Desert Tortoise Conservation Center where they will be cared for.



Mmmm. Dandelions—my favorites!

Where Is My Tortoise When It's So Hot?

Answer: Right where it should be, in the burrow where it's relatively cool. When it goes outside and gets hot, it will go back into the burrow to cool off by losing heat into the air and into the soil pressing most of its body against the cool soil.

If your tortoise is coming out rarely or only briefly, that's normal. It may not be eating much if at all. Why? It's too darned hot! If it ate well in spring, it has plenty stored to last through the hot spell.

Many tortoises take advantage of the cooler night temperatures and sleep outside the burrow. Their body temperatures will be cooler than if they had slept in the burrow, allowing them time before the high daytime temperatures to forage in the yard.

Monsoon Rains Are Coming

If it rains during the tortoises' active season, wild tortoises aren't likely to miss a chance to drink. But, your pet tortoise may not come out when it rains because it is sufficiently hydrated from water having been available all the time in the water dish or from the cactus pads and flowers you offer.

MegaDiet Corner

The Tortoise Group website offers an amazing wealth of information on MegaDiet. Check out some of these topics and many more at

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

- Converting a Tortoise from Vegetables to MegaDiet
- What If My Tortoise Won't Eat MegaDiet?
- MegaDiet Ingredients
- What's Wrong with Feeding My Tortoise Sweet Fruit?

No access to the web? Send a self-addressed stamped envelope stating which information you desire. Betty Burge, 5157 Poncho Circle, Las Vegas, NV 89119. (1 stamp/4 sheets of paper)

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@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 Factoid

Our tortoises ate 2 ½ tons of MegaDiet in 2009!

Have You or Your email Address Moved?

Please remember to send us your new physical and email address kutiger@embarqmail.com.

MegaDiet Satellite Sellers

Please call sellers for appointment

| | |
|---------------------------------------|---------------------|
| Nellis & Owens | Georgi – 459 - 1274 |
| Decatur & Gowan | Toni – 277-6179 |
| 215 & Hualapai (new) | Lorrie – 528-5584 |
| Cheyenne & Durango | Susann – 205 -7576 |
| I-215 & Far Hills | |
| Kathy & Pauline – 804-0472, 9am – 7pm | |
| Rainbow & Alta | Kellie –353-5513 |
| Charleston & Casino Center (new) | |
| Trilla at Ace Locksmiths: 382-1754 | |
| 215 & Tropicana | Athena – 891-8585 |
| Dean Martin & Blue Diamond | |
| Carolyn – 876-0668, ext. 874 | |
| Eastern & Windmill | Patsy – 269-7108 |
| Silverado Ranch & S. Maryland Pkwy | |
| Helene – 878-7877 | |
| Boulder Hwy & Equestrian | |
| Gail – 334-0015 Cell | |
| Warm Springs & Lake Mead | |
| Gay – 563-1924 | |
| Boulder City (new) | Carol – 293-6494 |
| Pahrump | Sheri –775-727-5557 |
| Kingman, AZ | Toni – 928-757-8317 |

OnLine Store at:

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

No computer? Call Susan – 702-458-8382

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

33% discount to TG members

Seeking Volunteers

- Green Valley
 - East & Southwest Las Vegas
- Call Kathy at 804-0472

**Questions from Tortoise Custodians
June 3, 2010 - Bob and Linda Are Worried**

Our Shelley has still not emerged from her underground home. We can see her but we have not yet seen her out and about. She typically comes out every April. What should we do?

TG Can you see her eyes? Have you seen her move? If so, does she appear to be free to move forward and out? Could she be stuck? If not, I suggest you poke her gently and listen for an exhalation of breath or movement.



Shelley is no longer trapped in her burrow

B&L Bob poked her with a long piece of PVC pipe a couple of weeks ago and she appeared to move. We can't see her eyes. He also dug her tunnel out to make sure it was wide enough for her to get in and out so I'm pretty certain that she isn't stuck. There is a small, undisturbed spider web across the front of her hole.

B&L I am so happy to tell you that we dug Shelly out on Monday and she is fine. She was pinned inside her home during the winter months by her wooden roof.

Bob decided to dismantle the entire habitat. When we finally got all the dirt off the roof and were able to lift the wood off, we could see that she had been stuck tight under it. Please advise other tortoise custodians to be cautious about a plywood roof that can sag and easily trap a tortoise over the long winter months.

Leslie Asks How Much MegaDiet to Offer Her Tortoise

I purchased some MegaDiet for our 5-year-old tortoise. I just have to wonder if she is getting enough. She seems to crave more. Should I make more and just let her eat to her heart content? I also feed desert willow flower and she loves those too?

TG The amounts listed on the package are more like minimum amounts. You can safely give your little tortoise as much MegaDiet as it wants. However, you do want the tortoise to learn to browse so that it doesn't depend entirely on you for food. Giving it desert willow flowers and letting it browse on grass, dandelions, and flowers is perfect. That way, it can feed itself and you don't have to worry when you are not at home to offer MegaDiet.



Good new growth (curved not pyramided) shows on Trekette's scutes since she began eating MegaDiet

Tonya Says Max Won't Eat MegaDiet

I can't get Max to eat MegaDiet. He didn't have it for 27 years and he is really a snob about it. I offer it occasionally and sometimes I get a nibble, but that's it. Any suggestions?

TG Try the tips on page 2. Softening MegaDiet with unsweetened apple juice has been very effective. Whatever combination of veggies you are offering Max, it's not what a tortoise would eat in the desert – and MegaDiet is. MegaDiet is very easy, and you can be assured that your little one is getting the right diet. Be tough.

Pet Desert Tortoise Hotline

by Lori Scott, Research Associate, DTCC

My first few months at the Desert Tortoise Conservation Center (DTCC) as the Pet Desert Tortoise Hotline Coordinator have been pretty exciting and there is rarely a dull moment. I am responsible for making sure that every lost or unwanted pet desert tortoise is picked up and brought to the DTCC, and for educating the public about proper tortoise care and laws regarding desert tortoises. There are many reasons that people call the hotline to surrender their pet desert tortoises, citing everything from economic difficulties to feeling that the tortoises are too difficult to care for. As a result, we pick up an average of 10-15 tortoises each day from April to October, and over 1000 each year! The pickup service is available free of charge to all residents of southern Nevada. This means that in a single day we can rack up hundreds of miles traveling throughout Las Vegas, Boulder City, Henderson, and Mesquite. We even travel over the hump to Pahrump (Nye County)!

Although we collect basic information from each caller, we never know quite what to expect when we arrive at the pickup location. We try to learn as much as possible at each pickup, from what the tortoise eats to where it was living and whether or not it hibernated each year. Unfortunately, many of the tortoises that we pick up are not in good health because the folks caring for them didn't provide the right environment or diet. Some of the more common and saddest scenarios we've seen recently involve desert tortoises being housed indoors in aquariums or terrariums. This type of housing doesn't allow a tortoise to do many of its natural behaviors like burrowing, foraging, thermo-regulating, and hibernating. Simply put, the only way to have a happy and healthy pet desert tortoise is to allow it to live outdoors in a spacious yard with a well built burrow and with access to lots of native plants for munching!

Upon arriving at the DTCC, every tortoise receives an ID number and a health evaluation from our

trained staff. This evaluation is vital in determining if a tortoise needs extra care or advanced rehabilitation in our medical center, or if it is healthy and can be moved to an area with a burrow and native grasses and plants.



Emaciated adult male. Note absence of fat pads on head and limbs; skull and arm bones are visible

Located on 222 acres of beautiful desert landscaping, the Desert Tortoise Conservation Center is operated by the San Diego Zoo in cooperation with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the Bureau of Land Management, and NV Department of Wildlife. The Pet Desert Tortoise Hotline operates seven days a week from 8am to 6pm, but earlier and later pickups are frequently scheduled to accommodate callers' needs. If you have desert tortoises you don't want any more, or if you find a tortoise in a residential or commercial area, please contact the Pet Desert Tortoise Hotline at 702-488-9422 to schedule a pickup!

Is Your Tortoise Healthy?

by Paula F. Kahn, PhD, Conservation Program Manager, DTCC

Care for desert tortoises may seem simple, but many tortoises picked up through the Pet Desert Tortoise Hotline are in very poor condition. We know that people love their tortoises and, even if they have had tortoises for most of their lives, many don't understand proper tortoise care. Desert tortoises are some of the hardiest animals in the world and, because of that, a tortoise can be sick for a long time before a custodian notices something wrong. So what might be signs or symptoms that your tortoise is not well?

Soft shell – Even if your tortoise has a proper diet, it must get free access to heat and light outdoors from the sun. Otherwise, it is not able to properly digest its food so it sucks calcium out of its bones and shell, causing them to become soft. When people keep tortoises indoors, particularly young tortoises and hatchlings, these tortoises literally turn to soup from the inside out. Think of it this way – **every day that a tortoise lives indoors is a day that it spends dying.**



Malnourished tortoise: soft shell, pyramided scutes, splayed hind nails and can't support its own weight

Discoloration – Discolored skin and/or shell is often the result of improper diet, but could be indicative of a disease process. Tortoises with soft shells often develop pink skin as their internal organs deteriorate.

Bulging eyes – Bulging eyes may be from nutritional deficiencies, or it can be related to a disease process. It is often seen in combination with soft shell and/or discoloration.



Nutritional deficiencies cause bulging eyes

Deformities – A tortoise's carapace should be relatively round over the top, but when tortoises are housed indoors or given improper nutrition, the scutes can become pyramided. They look like small towers of scutes, and while they are not directly harmful to the tortoise's health, they can impede them from turning themselves upright if they become flipped over. Deformities of the beak (underbite or soft beak) and nails also occur.

Abnormal behavior – If your tortoise is not acting the way it usually does, or it is not acting appropriately for the season, this could be the first sign that your tortoise is not well.

The Absolute Musts

- **In-ground burrow** - no housing indoors or on a patio (no dog houses or cardboard boxes on top of dirt or cement)
- **Nutritious foods** – no lettuce, spinach, or citrus!
- **Water** – shaded and always available

All of these needs must be met all the time

If your tortoise is soft or discolored, has deformities that have developed over time, changes behavior, or becomes lethargic, please see a desert tortoise veterinarian as soon as possible, or call the Pet Desert Tortoise Hotline at 702-488-9422 to surrender your tortoise to the San Diego Zoo's expert staff. It can take months, sometimes years, to rehabilitate tortoises that have lived indoors or without proper nutrition, but we do whatever we have to in order to ensure their health and well-being.

Summer and Fall Events

August 21, 1 - 3 pm

The New Tortoise Group

A fresh new Tortoise Group is emerging! Come join the excitement as we continue to craft new ways to do business. All ideas and volunteers are welcome.

We'll show off the progress we've made and flesh out our ideas for presentation at the Annual Meeting in September.

If you missed the first of these meetings, you are not alone. Several people have called to say they want to make the second meeting. They want to be part of the exciting change!

MegaDiet only will be sold 12:30-1:30.

September 18, 1 - 3 pm

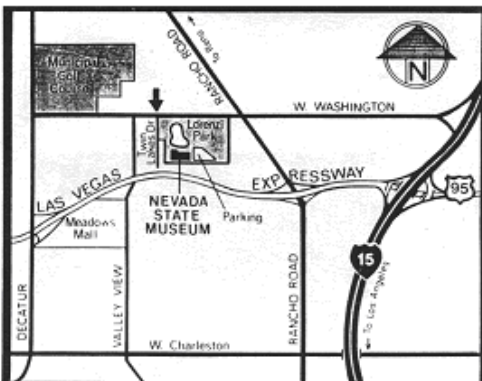
Tortoise Art Festival

The first-ever Tortoise Art Festival shows off the amazing ways in which the tortoise is reflected in arts and crafts. Come find just the tortoise art piece for your collection!

- Silent Auction
- Annual Meeting and Election of Officers
- Unveiling of The New Tortoise Group MegaDiet and other tortoise items for sale

Questions? Email Kathy or call at 804-0472
kutiger@embarqmail.com

Nevada State Museum in Lorenzi Park
700 Twin Lakes Drive, Las Vegas 89107



Special Tortoise at Silent Auction

This gorgeous tortoise art piece was created by Joel Spencer of Happenstance in Las Vegas as part of a window display by Tortoise Group at Gaia Flowers on E Charleston across from The Arts Factory. Did you see it last fall in September and October? Gaia Flowers donated an entire window for display to the organization chosen by the artist then currently on display. Bonnie Kelso, a tortoise owner and big Tortoise Group supporter, selected Tortoise Group!



3' x 4' x 3' high wrought iron and bamboo tortoise by Joel Spencer – September Silent Auction item

As a very large centerpiece for the Silent Auction in September, this tortoise will bring admirers from near and far. \$500 starting bid. Out-of-state bids are welcome kutiger@embarqmail.com

Tortoise Group Slate of Officers

Under its bylaws, Tortoise Group holds elections every two years. Often little change has been seen in the officers. However, this year our beloved Chairman, Betty Burge, has asked to step away from her office due to health. The board offers the following slate of officers (and nominations are taken from the floor.)

| | |
|---------------|---------------|
| Chairman | Kathy Utiger |
| Vice-Chairman | open |
| Secretary | open |
| Treasurer | Trilla Newton |

Problems with Birds Eating the MegaDiet?

When we put out MegaDiet pellets so that our tortoise can browse whenever it likes, the birds swoop right in and eat up all the MegaDiet. They love it, too! What is the solution? Build a blind that allows the tortoise to enter but is intimidating to birds and keeps them out.



1. Build a frame 12" x 12" x 14" high from PVC pipe



2. Sew a snug cover from shade cloth, leaving 2-3" each leg uncovered



3. Insert legs in ground until side cloth lies on ground 2-3". Hold cloth sides down with something heavy. Slit front cloth so door flaps.

Cut Here

| Tortoise Group Membership Form | | |
|--|-------------|---|
| Memberships and contributions may be tax deductible | | |
| 1. Please Print the COMPLETE address | | |
| Name _____ | Phone _____ | |
| Address _____ | | |
| City _____ | State _____ | Zip Code _____ |
| E-mail _____ | | |
| 2. Check One Newsletter Option | 2010 | 3. Check amount for your 1-year membership |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Send my newsletter in hard copy, and send Tortoise Tips and other news by e-mail | | <input type="checkbox"/> \$15 <input type="checkbox"/> \$25 <input type="checkbox"/> \$35 <input type="checkbox"/> \$50 <input type="checkbox"/> \$75 <input type="checkbox"/> Life \$500 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Send my newsletter by e-mail | | Special Contribution: _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Send my newsletter in hard copy | | |
| 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 | | |

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

Editor Kathy Utiger
Board of Directors

Officers
Chairman Betty Burge
Vice-Chairman/ Kathy Utiger
Secretary open
Treasurer Trilla Newton

Members
Laura Deitsch, Wende Lestelle,
Susan Stater, Laura Wright

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

Summer-Fall Calendar for 2010

August 21, 1-3 pm

A fresh new Tortoise Group is emerging! Come join the excitement as we continue to craft new ways to do business. All ideas and volunteers are welcome. MegaDiet only will be sold from 12:30-1:30.

September 18, 1-3 pm

The first-ever Tortoise Art Festival shows off the amazing ways in which the tortoise is reflected in arts and crafts. Come find just the tortoise art piece for your collection! Silent Auction and Annual Meeting with elections, also. MegaDiet and other tortoise items will be sold at this meeting.

Details on page 6

Material submitted to the Tortoise Group
Newsletter becomes the property of Tortoise
Group and may be edited before printing.

Printed on recycled paper

