

# 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 XXIV No. 1 March 2011

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

Las Vegas, Nevada

## **Waiting for My Tortoise!** by Kathy Utiger

And just where is that little critter? Do remember than your tortoise likely follows the same time schedule each year. Mine comes out about mid-March, while my neighbor's appears around the end of April. Keeping records helps you to not worry.

If you can't tell whether or not your tortoise has come out, try: 1) the Q-Tip barrier shown on page 3. 2) Perfect the technique of using a mirror to reflect sunlight into the burrow, Information Sheet #28 [www.tortoisegroup.org/infosheets/infosheet28.php](http://www.tortoisegroup.org/infosheets/infosheet28.php) 3) If you you're really concerned, try sliding a long pole down the burrow and listen for movement or an exhalation of breath. Slide it down a few inches and listen, slide and listen, repeat. Chances are that you'll stir something up and your tortoise will be curious enough to come out after 15 or 20 minutes. 4) As a last resort, call for the Snooper Service, 804-0472. For a \$25 charge we'll bring our video equipment to look in your burrow.

## **Nevada Regulations Clarified for Desert Tortoise Custodians**

Desert tortoises are classified as wildlife, whether raised in captivity or not. As wildlife, desert tortoises belong to the people of the State of Nevada. Therefore, we who have tortoises are custodians, not owners. We have the obligation to care for our tortoise(s) properly. If we can no longer care for a tortoise, we must surrender it to the Desert Tortoise Conservation Center at 702-499-9422. **We do not have the option to give the tortoise(s) or its offspring to another individual—they're not ours to give.**

- New tortoise adoptions are limited to one male tortoise per household.



**"Sidney just out of brumation in 2010" by Charlene Pennington**

## **Time for a Habitat Spruce Up!**

Spring is bursting upon us and I have just about three weeks before my Tad may show himself. I want to be sure his habitat is safe and ready. Here's my list of to do's:

- Pick up winter's accumulated clutter
- Prune Tad's mallow, grape vines, and other plants
- Remove any mustard and thistles, leaving the filaree and dandelions, of course
- Prune a good path around the edge of the year where he walks
- Plant some fresh new plants
- Clean out the water area
- Check carefully to pick up any litter, especially colorful pieces, that may have blown in

## **Free Tortoise Plants at March Meeting!**

Your board of directors has plans to spruce up the monthly meetings to bring you more fun and information: short interactive workshops, very brief committee updates, and more! After the meeting in March, be sure to take a free plant that your tortoise will love to eat. We'll see you soon!

## MegaDiet Corner

The Tortoise Group website offers an amazing amount of information on offering MegaDiet. Check out some of these topics and many more at <http://www.tortoisegroup.org/megadiet.php>

- Converting a Tortoise from Vegetables to MegaDiet
- What If My Tortoise Won't Eat MegaDiet?
- When Do I Feed My Tortoise?
- Should I Add Vitamins?

No Internet? Send a SASE to the Tortoise Group address listed on page 8 with the items requested.

## MegaDiet Prices Slashed!

We took the challenge: how can we get MegaDiet to more tortoises in this tough economy? The answer - lower the price! By buying in large quantity, we are thrilled to be able to pass along the savings to tortoise custodians nationwide. Here's the new price structure:

### Members      NonMembers

#### Price/1 ½ lb Bag

\$6.00              \$10.00

#### Price reduction

25%                20%

#### Price/20# Sac

\$70.00            \$100.00

#### Savings over per-bag price

\$9.80              \$33.00 **WOW!**

## MegaDiet Factoid

The freshly produced 2 tons of MegaDiet have been bagged and are waiting for you at your Las Vegas Satellite Sellers and online. Stock up today! Please add \$0.50 for online prices.

## Have You or Your email Address Moved?

Please remember to send your new physical and email addresses to [gnbowler78@hotmail.com](mailto:gnbowler78@hotmail.com)

## MegaDiet Satellite Sellers

Please call sellers for appointment

Nellis & Owens	Georgi – 459 - 1274
Decatur & Gowan	Toni – 277-6179
Cheyenne & Durango	Susann – 205 -7576
215 & Far Hills	Kathy & Pauline 804-0472, 9am – 7pm
Rainbow & Alta	Kellie –243-7597
Charleston & Casino Center (new)	Trilla at Ace Locksmiths: 382-1754
215 & W Tropicana	Athena – 682-0307
215 & S. Decatur	Carolyn – 378-6514 cell 453-7888 x824
Eastern & Windmill	Patsy – 269-7108 cell 614-7996 h
215 & S. Eastern	Helene – 375-7998 h 896-1050 cell
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 a member \$6.00 lasts a large desert tortoise about one month. MegaDiet is also sold at Tortoise Group meetings.

**40% discount to TG members**

### Seeking Satellite Sellers

- NW Las Vegas
- East & Southwest Las Vegas

Contact Carol Thompson at 702-232-3420  
or [columbothompson@cox.net](mailto:columbothompson@cox.net)

## MegaDiet Bagging Saw a Record Turnout of Wonderful Volunteers

by Carol Thompson



**Abigail, Yesenia, and Hanna greet volunteers at Walter Bracken Elementary School on MegaDiet Bagging Day**

Thank you, thank you to the 70 Tortoise Group volunteers and children, students, parents, and friends who answered the call and had a wonderful tortoise time at Walter Bracken Elementary School on February 12. My first venture as MegaDiet Coordinator left me a little breathless from the energy and speed with which the two tons of boxes were bagged, boxed and delivered. What a team! Bracken students gave tours of their three tortoise habitats and made us special tortoise treats—yum!



**What a production! MegaDiet bagging in full swing on February 12 where 70 volunteers truly make the work light**

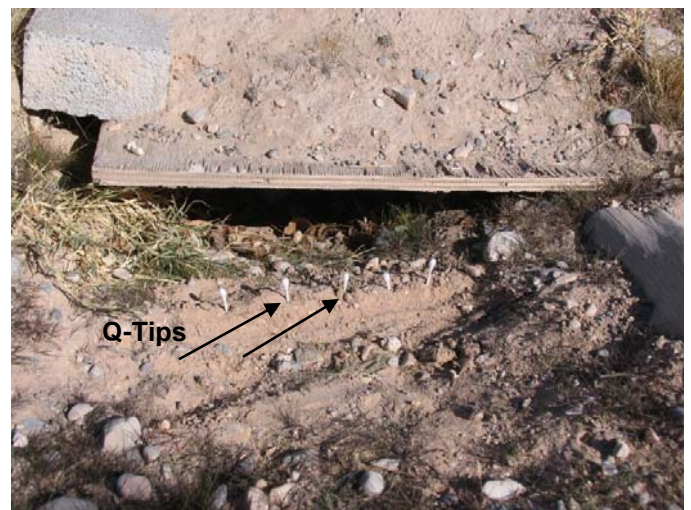
## Fourth Graders with Tortoise Habitats Study Tortoises by Dr Deanna Ojeda, DVM

Walter Bracken Elementary School boasts three tortoise habitats! In 2010, Tortoise Group began hand-on teaching about tortoises to fourth graders. Carla Malewicz, Kathy Utiger, and I worked with small groups to teach tortoise terminology, how tortoises work (not like us!), and how to observe tortoise behavior as scientists. In spring students will study tortoise care and habitat improvement (design and plants) and tortoise diet. Click here <http://tv.ccsd.net/watch?v=PldPtIKK0VC8> to watch a very cute student video about tortoises.

In late October, my wonderful staff and I hosted 20 Bracken students at our VCA Nellis Animal Hospital for special tortoise education in x-ray, anatomy, giving a tortoise a physical exam, crafts -- and pizza! Four groups of students rotated between stations and asked questions that challenged the best of us! The future of our precious tortoises is surely safe in those bright, eager minds.

## Did My Tortoise Come Out Today?

Stick a few Q-Tips in the dirt in a row in front of your tortoise's burrow. When the Q-Tips are knocked over, you'll know your tortoise came out!



**Knocked-down Q-Tips barrier show tortoise activity**

## Spring Doings for Your Tortoises

by Betty Burge, MS

New tortoise owners may appreciate a few reminders about what to do for your tortoise when it finally emerges in March or April. By now your pen for hatchlings should be finished and the tortoises can wake up naturally. The earlier in the season a tortoise emerges for the first time and starts to bask for a few hours a day the longer it may be before it starts eating.

- Check the list of Satellite Sellers of MegaDiet in this newsletter. Buy some, put it in the refrigerator, not the freezer, and have it ready for your tortoise.
- Do a tortoise spring yard cleanup: Plastic grocery bags and large pieces of paper can entangle your tortoise if wedged inside the burrow. Take a few minutes to check for such litter and sparkly bits the tortoise might eat.



**“Fred just out of brumation in 2010”  
by Carole Ennis**

- Before your tortoise awakens, get those valuable dandelions transplanted. Don't wait too long. Print out Information Sheet #13 at [www.tortoisegroup.org/infosheets/infosheet13.php](http://www.tortoisegroup.org/infosheets/infosheet13.php) No computer? Send us a self-addressed stamped

envelope and request that sheet. Dandelions need all the help they can get to become established. Don't worry, come summer you will have a hard time seeing them in the grass but the tortoises can find them.

- Give your tortoise a soak in a basin with lukewarm water that does not come up to the nose as the tortoise stands in the basin. Do not leave the tortoise. It may just soak or may also drink. When drinking, the snout may stay under water for 15-20 minutes! When it tries to climb out of the basin remove it, dry it completely, and set it in the sun.
- Check to see that the eyes are open and are clear of discharge or cloudiness. If caked, gently wipe warm water along the edges of the lids with a Q-Tip. Several applications should free any dried matter holding the eye closed. That may be just the first step in treating the problem.
- Give the body a good looking over for any sores. Open sores can attract flies and their maggots are a real threat.
- Dust off any ticks into a bucket of soapy water using a dry toothbrush. Information Sheet #18.
- If you think your tortoise has a health problem, we have a list of veterinarians in the Las Vegas area who take care of tortoise problems, IS #24.
- Cockroaches sharing the burrow are keeping it tidy. They are not a problem for tortoises. If you are concerned because cockroaches or ants are coming in your house, have a reputable pest spraying service just spray the base of the house where it meets the ground or pavement. Do not spray the foliage. Tortoise are very sensitive to poisons and total yard spraying will be killing helpful insects as well as those you think you don't want. For years we have been asking homeowners that we visit prior to adoption how they keep their flowers so beautiful and rarely does anyone say that they use pest sprays or bait. After 31 years of yard visits, we feel that those gardeners have good advice for us.

(Reprinted from the TG March 2008 newsletter)

## Is Your Tortoise Healthy?

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

### Runny Nose

Tortoises with runny noses may have upper respiratory tract disease, which is only transmitted through fluids. If you have more than one tortoise, you should separate those with runny noses from those without because even if they have all shown symptoms, you can stop the transmission by keeping them apart. Bring your tortoises with runny noses to the vet for evaluation, and treat them with medication. Once all of them are symptom free, you can put all your tortoises back together again (preferably not putting males and females together since back yard breeding of tortoises is a huge problem!)

### Abnormal Behaviors

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.

### Uroliths

Uroliths are bladder stones that often result from improper nutrition and dehydration. Many people think that desert tortoises don't need water, but nothing is further from the truth. We recommend that your pet tortoise always have free access to clean water, and that you soak your tortoise for 30 minutes in a shallow bin of water every week during the active season. If a tortoise develops a bladder stone and the stone grows too large to pass naturally, it must be surgically removed or the tortoise will die a long painful death.

### 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**



**X-ray shows a 4-inch bladder stone that was successfully removed with surgery**

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.

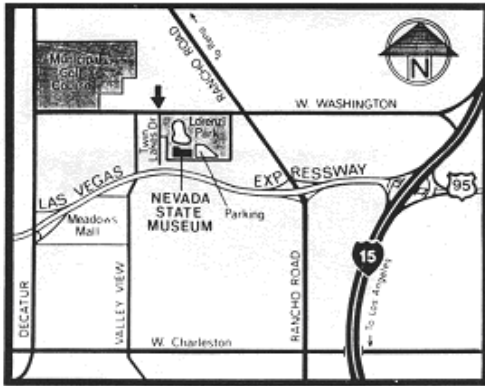
### Importance of Regular Checkups: A Note from a Wiser Custodian by Kathy Utiger

My Tad had been so happy and healthy that it didn't occur to me to take him to the vet for a checkup. It just happened that Dr. Deanna Ojeda used Tad to demonstrate a tortoise checkup to fourth graders visiting from Walter Bracken Elementary School (see p. 3). Because he was already there, she offered to take an x-ray, and wow! Tad has a 1 ½ inch bladder stone that will have to be surgically removed this spring after he's up and fully functioning. Annual checkups are in Tad's future.

## Spring Events

March 12, 1 - 3 pm

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



### Hot News from the DTCC!

By Lori Scott, Research Associate and Hotline Coordinator

Curious about the DTCC and what they do out there? Lori will give a brief overview of the DTCC and the Pet Desert Tortoise Hotline: the history, what they do and where they provide service. You may be astounded by what you hear.

Lori has devoted herself to the Hotline and I know that you will be fascinated by hearing:

- Some of the Hotline statistics from 2010
- The main issues they see on the Hotline including breeding and hatchlings, as well as some of the care concerns they come across at the pickups.
- Several fun, interesting stories from the Hotline in 2010, like Big Guy going back to his home.
- Upcoming events and future drop-off locations (a new program)

**MegaDiet and other tortoise items will be for sale**

Please call Kathy with any questions, 702-804-0472

### April 16, 9:30 -11:30 am Field Trip to the Desert Tortoise Conservation Center (DTCC)

Meet at Exploration Peak Park at 9:30; depart by carpool at 9:45 for the DTCC (directions below)

Don't be late, as only vehicles in the caravan will be admitted to the DTCC

Don't miss this unique opportunity to visit the DTCC. This facility not open to the public is now managed by the San Diego Zoo. Lori Scott, Research Associate and Hotline Coordinator, will show us first hand how the facility has improved in recent years. After a short presentation on site rules, she will take us for a tour to highlight the work that the zoo is conducting. We'll see lots of tortoises large and small!

**Signup:** We are limited to 40 people. Tortoise Group members will have priority. Email Kathy at [KathyUtiger@TortoiseGroup.org](mailto:KathyUtiger@TortoiseGroup.org) or call 702-804-0472 to sign up. Children are welcome!

- Be sure to wear comfortable walking shoes, appropriate clothing for the outdoors including a hat and sunglasses, and bring a bottle of water (preferably a reusable one since the DTCC implements the values of Leave No Trace).
- All photographs you take are considered property of the San Diego Zoo. They may be shared with friends but not used for profit.

#### Directions:

From Blue Diamond Road, turn south on Buffalo Drive into Mountain's Edge development. Meet in the large parking lot at Exploration Peak Park on the east (left) side of the road. Look for the Tortoise Group sign. Please plan extra driving time. **Late-comers will not be accommodated.**



### **Tortoise Group Elects New Officers**

Your new officers are Chairman - Kathy Utiger, Vice-Chairman – Mayrene Lum-Roberts, Secretary – Katie Decker, Treasurer - Trilla Newton.

This winter has not seen the board brumating but rather moving forward to create a modern business model. We have established a new mailing address, moved all our equipment to a storage facility, enhanced our Adoption Committee process, are setting up a new phone system, and more! We'll keep you informed at the meeting and online with the breaking news.

### **Spring Sales of Plants for Tortoises**

**Acacia Demonstration Garden in Henderson**

March 5 and 26, April 9 and 23, 8 am – noon

Plant sizes include 6-packs, 3" and 1 gallon

### **Springs Preserve**

March 26, 8 am – 2 pm


Information Sheet #21 Plants to Grow for Tortoises

<http://www.tortoisegroup.org/infosheets/infosheet21.php>

### **Let's Track When Tortoises Come Out!**

Comment on our Facebook Page to let us know when your tortoise is out of brumation. Tell us the date and where you live, either where in Las Vegas or in what other city. Let's keep track and see when our wonderful reptiles make their first appearances for Spring 2011! We'll hear when each tortoise comes out!



Not on Facebook yet? Click on the  in the upper righthand corner of the Tortoise Group Home page to be redirected to Facebook where you can set up your account.

### **Tortoise Pictures Wanted**

Please send me those cute tortoise pictures so I can put them in the newsletter! Tell me your tortoise's name and maybe a caption, too. Thank you

[KathyUtiger@TortoiseGroup.org](mailto:KathyUtiger@TortoiseGroup.org)

----- 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      2011**

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

40% 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**  
PO Box 33866  
Las Vegas, NV 89133  
702-739-7113

**Editor** Kathy Utiger  
**Board of Directors**

**Officers**  
Chairman Kathy Utiger  
Vice-Chairman Mayrene Lum-Roberts  
Secretary Katie Decker  
Treasurer Trilla Newton

**Members**  
Laura Deitsch (on leave),  
Karen Kampfer, Wende Lestelle,  
Susan Stater

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

## Spring Calendar for 2011

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Details on page 6

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