

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

Las Vegas, Nevada

March Kickoff Meeting to Be a Doozy!

If you're hoping to spruce up your habitat with new plants this spring but don't know what to buy, just come to the March 17 meeting and enjoy. Beth Hewitt of Cactus Joe's Blue Diamond Nursery will tell us about the new native desert tortoise plants they are growing. **And, Tortoise Group will gift a native desert plant to each family!** More to come on Beth and Cactus Joe's by email. Also, Mandy Nicholson is kindly donating prickly pear starts! Details on page 6.



Duke "helping" by P. Patrick

Memberships Due on January 1

On January 1, 2012, Tortoise Group went back to its previous membership policy, which is an annual membership. Now, all memberships expire on December 31. We appreciate your patience as we experimented with another system. Please renew!

To give everyone a chance to get used to the new policy, the board has relaxed two of the policies for this year:

- Anyone who purchased a membership in the last quarter of 2011, not just new members, has been extended the 2012 membership as well.
- Members who receive their newsletter in hard copy (a benefit of membership) but who have not yet renewed that membership will receive this March newsletter in hard copy.

Betty Burge Demonstration Tortoise Habitat at the Springs Preserve

Tortoise Group has partnered with the Springs Preserve to turn an existing area into a demonstration tortoise habitat with a live tortoise. Tortoise Group will take on several aspects of this very exciting project. As a partner, we may wish to mount a fund drive to help in making this an exceptional display. The Desert Tortoise Council may also participate. This project is in the formative stages, so stay tuned.

Tortoise Habitat Checkup

Pick a nice sunny day to spruce up your habitat:

- Check that the emitters and sprinkler heads
- Check the controller and make review the water days and irrigation times
- Pick up any paper bits, plastic bags, and shiny things
- Clear out the entrance to the burrow
- Cut the grass so that it is short and your tortoise will not choke on it
- Put in some fresh plants, maybe even those delicious petunias
- Get ready to enjoy the spring with your tortoise

Two Field Trips Planned for April

April 14-Cactus Joe's Blue Diamond Nursery
April 29 – Desert Tortoise Conservation Center
Details on page 6

MegaDiet Corner

The Tortoise Group website has a lot of valuable 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?

Yummy-to-Eat MegaDiet

If you haven't offered your tortoise MegaDiet in the five or ten years, it may be time for another try. Tortoise Group members report that their tortoises take to it easily now. There's a fruity fragrance rather than the old alfalfa smell. Tortoises really go for it!

MegaDiet Sellers in Las Vegas

- Please note that we have both lost and gained Satellite Sellers. Locate the one handiest for you and be sure to call ahead to make an appointment to purchase your MegaDiet.
- Interested in becoming a Satellite Seller? Check the map to see if we have a gap in your area. We need sellers in the NW, SW, and through the center of the city. We have handy sellers near the 215 exits. Contact Sherri if you can help 435-4696, sherri376@aol.com.

MegaDiet Tip

Are you having trouble with birds swooping in to eat up your MegaDiet pellets? If so, try building the little shelter that we described in our August 2010 newsletter, page 7

<http://www.tortoisegroup.org/newsletters/2010%20Aug.pdf> The sides are short enough for the tortoise to walk in and out but long enough that birds will not enter. It's an easy solution to having pellets always available.

MegaDiet Satellite Sellers

Please call sellers for appointment

Nellis & Owens	Georgi – 459 – 1274
Ann & Camino al Norte	new Don – 374-2466
Decatur & Gowan	Toni – 277-6179
Smoke Ranch & Jones	new Julie – 245-4671
Cheyenne & Durango	Susann – 205 – 7576
215 & Far Hills	Kathy & Pauline
Rainbow & Alta (no longer selling)	Kellie
Charleston & Casino Center	Trilla at Ace Locksmiths: 382-1754
215 & W Tropicana	Athena – 682-0307
215 & S. Decatur	Carolyn – 534-7888 x824 378-6514 cell
Eastern & Windmill	Patsy – 269-7108 cell
215 & S. Eastern	Helene – 878-7877 w 375-7998 cell
Boulder Hwy & Equestrian	Gail – 334-0015 Cell
Warm Springs & Lake Mead	Gay – 563-1924
215 & 95 at Van Wagenen	new Peggy – 281-3048
Boulder City	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

Tortoise Month at the Springs Preserve!!!!

Training to Take Part In Tortoise Group Events

Tortoise Month at the Springs Preserve

May 2012 is Tortoise Month at the Springs Preserve! Here's what Tortoise Group has committed to do with the help of lots of trained volunteers. Except for the first weekend in May when we host a fair booth, each Saturday and Sunday, Tortoise Group will staff the following:

- One-hour class from 1:30-2:30 entitled, "A Dinosaur in Your Back Yard: A Desert Tortoise As a Pet." We'll create a lively hour for families to learn about tortoises.
- Two "demo carts" to be staffed from 10 am – about 1:30 pm. These carts will each present one tortoise idea through an interactive display:
 - What tortoises eat: a focus on seeds and native plants. We'll give away a native seed mix packet
 - Burrows: how a tortoise protects itself from the heat and cold vs how people protect themselves (with hats, sunscreen)

Get Trained

Everyone who wants to be part of this exciting project will be trained at one of the two workshops outlined in column 2, *Training Set for All Tortoise Group Volunteers*

Have Fun!

We have an extraordinary opportunity to tell thousands of people about our wonderful tortoises. We'll dispel the myth that it's illegal to be a tortoise custodian and help them understand how to care for pet tortoise in a safe and healthy manner. Want to get in on something terrific? Sign up now! Everyone welcome and needed!

Training Set for All Tortoise Group Volunteers

Everyone who interacts with the public on behalf of Tortoise Group, please sign up to attend one of the two March training classes to learn the latest on feeding, adoption regulations, and how a tortoise works. That way, we'll all give out the same messages. There's a lot of new information to learn, even for you old-timers. That's all volunteers, old and new.

Sunday, March 25 and Saturday March 31

(sign up for one day)

1-5 pm

REI Store in Boca Park

Community Room at the back of the store

710 S. Rampart (NE corner of Rampart and Charleston)

Las Vegas, NV 89145

After the basic training, we'll follow up with training for the special needs of each team: Tortoise Month, Adoption, MegaDiet Seller, Education in the School Habitats, Hotline Calls, Snooper Visits, Board Member, Yard Consultations, Fairs Booths, Speakers, Burrow Digging, and more. Training is guaranteed to be fun and interesting!

Sign up today to volunteer with Tortoise Group, even if you're not sure how you want to be involved. Interested? Have questions? Email Kathy at KathyUtiger@TortoiseGroup.org and be sure to indicate which date you'll attend. Can't come those days? Let Kathy know of your interest and we'll work with those people.

Send In Tortoise Photos Please!

Duke is featured in this issue because Pam and Powell sent in photos I could use. Please send yours. Make them colorful and safe, examples of good tortoise care, feeding, and safety. Sadly, most photos I receive do not meet those criteria kathyutiger@tortoisegroup.org

To Germinate or Not to Germinate: That Is the Question by Beth Tomica-Hewitt and Seanna Larson

The Mojave Desert Awakens

Spring in the Mojave Desert is an amazing time of year for the Las Vegas Valley. We get to enjoy mild temperatures, migratory birds moving through, spring wildflowers plus our pet tortoise becomes active. While our pet tortoise can depend on a steady influx of food through the active season (March-October), its wild counterparts are dependent on their environment to supply all of their needs. In wet years the Mojave Desert boasts an beautiful wildflower display providing a wonderful and diverse plant palette for desert wildlife to browse on.



Arizona Lupine and Globe Mallow

Like the desert tortoise, Mojave Desert plants have special survival strategies for coping with life in the desert. Desert plants have adapted to life in the Mojave which affects all aspects of their life cycle from germination, pollination, fruiting and seed dispersal. Plants face the same challenges as other desert dwellers including extreme temperatures both high and low along with prolonged drought conditions. One way plants have adapted is through requirements needed for germination.

Germination: Where the Magic Happens

Germination, when the plant emerges from the seed, is the start of a plant's life. Requirements needed for germination to occur vary greatly between species. Some species stay dormant in the seed bank for decades waiting for just the right conditions to trigger germination, while other species like desert marigold, plantago and desert dandelion start to sprout with a minimal amount of moisture. The rate and speed of germination and seedling development are strongly influenced by temperature, moisture, and light requirements as well as soil type. Plants that readily germinate get a jump start on their life cycle but tend to have a shorter life. Annuals and biannuals are plants that can complete their life cycle in one or two seasons. Unfortunately some of our most problematic invasive species are included in this group.



Desert Marigold - 4 weeks old

Some plant species have seeds that require specific environmental conditions to break seed dormancy. Some species require a period of prolonged cold, moist conditions to germinate. This period is known as cold stratification; many of the penstemon species fall into this category. Other species need to have the seed coat mechanically or chemically damaged to break seed dormancy. Many of the

legumes, like the Mesquite, fall into this category. The seed will expend all of its stored energy and resources once the germination process begins and once it's been triggered, there's no going back: it is an all-or-nothing gamble.

The Fruits of Their Labor-Desert Seeds

During a year with good rain in the winter, desert plants start blooming as early as February and March with different species flowering at different times throughout the spring, summer, and fall. The plants are able to bloom because of adequate water and nutrition. It takes quite a bit of energy for plants to make flowers, so if there's not enough water, the plants' survival mechanisms take over, forcing the plants to hold onto their precious resources and wait for a better year. To get them through the year, many insects rely on spring flowers and their nectar, without which they might in turn have a bad year too.

Desert plants have adaptations, though, that make it easier to flower on low energy. For instance instead of having large, showy flowers that you would see in tropical climates, they have very small flowers that often times rely on the wind not insects to do the work of pollination. Many times the plants will flower but due to lack of water, such as the ground drying up too fast, they won't have enough energy to turn the pollinated flowers into seeds and fruits. This is the worst part, because many of our desert dwellers supplement their diet with these desert fruits even though their small size is small. It is also unfortunate for those of us who collect seed, because many times a dry winter will mean that we will not be doing much seed collection that year. However don't let me get you down, the desert, especially our desert, is full of survivors who make it year after year on what they can and have for hundreds of years. Your desert tortoise is one of the most well-adapted desert survivors there is! So remember that when you're out and about in the desert this spring.

Our spring bloom should start toward the end of March and hopefully last thru May. The wildflower season is both temperature and moisture dependent.

As we have had a dry, warm winter, we will most likely have a poor spring bloom. Many of our desert annuals depend on winter and springs rains to germinate. Without adequate rain events at the right time of year, many of our desert annuals will remain dormant in the seed bank waiting for the right conditions to sprout to life. However, even in drought years we can still look forward to enjoying the hardiest of desert species including some of our tortoise favorites like globe mallow, white evening primrose, desert dandelion, desert marigold, desert pincushion, desert four o'clock, mojave aster, plantago and most of the cactus species. Make sure you take time this spring to look for wildflowers; you just never know what you will find!



Desert Dandelion



Nevada Beavertail

TG 2012 Calendar

All General Meetings

1 – 3 pm

Las Vegas Library

833 Las Vegas Boulevard North

Las Vegas, NV 89101

Right across from Cashman Center



Saturday, March 17, 1-3 pm

General Meeting

New Native Desert Plants for Your Tortoise:

What plants do tortoises like? What's available?

What's new? by Beth Hewitt of Cactus Joe's Blue Diamond Nursery

Plus!!!!!!

- Workshop on New Tortoise Feeding Guidelines
- Free native plant to each family!
- Free prickly pear cactus starts

Saturday, May 19, 1-3 pm

Jennifer Parsons from the San Diego Zoo will speak on nutrition and feeding. We'll gain an understanding of how the tortoise's digestive system works and, therefore, the type of feeding that is appropriate.

Saturday, June 23, 1-3 pm

Creating or Improving a Desert Tortoise Habitat

Saturday, July 28, 1-3 pm

Saturday, August 25, 1-3 pm

Saturday, September 22, 1-3 pm

Tortoise Group Training

Sunday, March 25 and Saturday March 31

(sign up for one day)

Everyone who would like to interact with the public on behalf of Tortoise Group, please sign up for one of these two classes to learn the latest on feeding, adoption regulations, and how a tortoise works. (Tortoise Month at the Springs Preserve, Adoption, Hotline, Fairs, Snooper, Satellite Seller, Board Member, Speakers) (To sign up, email Kathy at KathyUtiger@TortoiseGroup.org)

See page 3 to learn more

1-5 pm

REI Store in Boca Park

Community Room at the back of the store

710 S. Rampart (NE corner of Rampart and

Charleston)

Las Vegas, NV 89145

Spring Field Trips

Saturday, April 14, 9:30-11:30

Field Trip to Cactus Joe's Blue Diamond Nursery

12740 Blue Diamond Road

Blue Diamond, NV 89004

Meet in the parking lot of the nursery by 9:30 am

Sunday, April 29, 9:30-noon

Field Trip to the Desert Tortoise Conservation Center (DTCC)

Meet at Exploration Park in Mountain's Edge

at 9:30 (Buffalo and Blue Diamond)

(not appropriate for small children)

Two consecutive tours to choose from:

- Tour #1: In depth look at DTCC procedures and clinics, hatchling and quarantine pens (less outdoor time and little walking)
- Tour #2: Introduction to DTCC procedures and clinics, and a hike through the outlying pen areas (tour over uneven desert terrain for 1/2 mile) (To sign up for Tour #1 or Tour #2), email Kathy at KathyUtiger@TortoiseGroup.org

Tortoise Custodian Spring Checklist

Please take a few minutes to do the few things below for your tortoise's safety and health.

- Renew your membership
- Find the Satellite Seller closest or most convenient for you
<http://www.tortoisegroup.org/satseller.php>
- Check the Events/Meetings tab and mark all the meetings and events on your calendar
- Take a tour of our website and give us some feedback, please. You may be surprised by the amount of information you find.
- Print out Information Sheet #35 External Examination Checklist for Signs of Deficiencies, Disease, or Injury. When your tortoise is up and active, take time to do this thorough checkup.
- Pick up litter and other debris

- Acquaint yourself with the topics covered on the Information Sheets (all 36 of them and more to come)
<http://www.tortoisegroup.org/infosheets/infosheets.php>
 - Plants to Grow for Tortoise, Information Sheet #21, is a popular one all season
 - If you have an unprotected pool, having read Information Sheet #25 is critical in an emergency
 - When you need a vet, know in advance who you want to visit, Information Sheet #24
- Check for tortoise hazards. Yard items may have been moved over the winter.
- Perhaps erect a Q-Tip fence so you'll know when the tortoise has emerged. See example at <http://www.tortoisegroup.org/newsletters/2010%20Mar.pdf> page 3
- Enjoy your tortoise!

----- 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	2012	3. Check amount you wish for your 1-year membership
<input type="checkbox"/> Send my newsletter by e-mail		() \$15 () \$25 () \$35 () \$50 () \$75 () Life \$500
<input type="checkbox"/> Send my newsletter in hard copy		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		

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The Tortoise Group newsletter is published four times yearly:
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Duke enjoying gazenias by P. Patrick

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



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