

# Tortoise Group Newsletter

Tortoise Group  
A non-profit organization since 1982

Volume XXV No. 3 July 2012

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

Las Vegas, Nevada

## Be the Legal Custodian of Your Tortoise!

Did you acquire your desert tortoise from a friend like most people do? If that tortoise was born after August 4, 1989, you do not have it legally. But that can change now with a new adoption program authorized by the US Fish & Wildlife Service and the Nevada Department of Wildlife.

[Register-to-Legally-Adopt](#) your desert tortoise on the Tortoise Group website. Just refresh yourself on tortoise care and habitat guidelines, and complete the process by printing an individualized Adoption Certificate. You never again have to worry that your tortoise is not legal! You will be the official custodian. Limited to desert tortoises.

**Transfer a Tortoise.** If you are about to accept a tortoise from a friend, jump on the website and [register](#) that tortoise, making the transfer legal and you the legal custodian.

## Lonesome George Died

The giant tortoise Lonesome George died in the Galapagos Islands on June 25. He was the very last of his sub-species, the Pinta Island Tortoise (*Chelonoidis nigra abingdonii*), which is now sadly extinct. He reached a healthy 200 pounds and five feet in length, and died of old age at more than 100.

[Lonesome George](#) was discovered in 1972 on Pinta Island when it was thought that tortoises on the island were extinct, and he was moved to Santa Cruz Island in the Galapagos. Despite conservationists' best efforts over the next 40 years, he remained a confirmed bachelor with no known offspring. The lone tortoise became a symbol for the Galapagos Islands and for endangered species.

Mike Sweeney

Exec Dir, The Nature Conservancy in California

## New Home for Your Male Tortoises!

More good news! Do you have a male tortoise that you have to give up? You may want to separate a mating pair, two males may be fighting, or you may be moving. Whatever the reason, contact us and we will put your boy on a list for adoption. Email [KathyUtiger@TortoiseGroup.org](mailto:KathyUtiger@TortoiseGroup.org) or 804-0472. A fee of \$10 for members, \$25 for nonmembers.



*Teddy eating his favorite hibiscus by Mary Jo Morrison*

## Tortoise Group to Visit Outlying Areas

Do you live in Bunkerville, Goodsprings, Pahrump, Logandale or another area not close to Las Vegas? Did you know that we support all of southern Nevada? Jerry Shupe plans to visit each area on an upcoming weekend. If you have any issue at all with a tortoise, a burrow, habitat questions, or just need some advice on something in your habitat, email [kathyutiger@tortoisegroup.org](mailto:kathyutiger@tortoisegroup.org). We'll arrange a weekend day when Jerry can speak with tortoise folks in your area.

Please send email updates to  
[qmbowler78@hotmail.com](mailto:qmbowler78@hotmail.com)



## **Seasonal Behavior**

It's hot out there so tortoise behavior has changed from earlier this year. Your tortoise no longer needs to bask for one or two hours to warm up to the level at which its body functions. It's already warm enough when it emerges from its burrow. A nice 85-90°F outside is perfect for browsing.

The burrow is warming up, too. Soon the afternoon temperature in the burrow may reach the high 90s or more. Your tortoise will seek its optimum temperature throughout the day. If the burrow is 95° at 10 pm when it's 88° outside, you may well find your tortoise sleeping outside. Mine does, and then he retreats to the burrow in the early morning.

Eating. Tortoises may choose to eat different plants throughout the year. My tortoise eats very well all spring, and in mid-summer he doesn't seem very hungry. Sometimes I offer him MegaDiet and he walks right through it! His browsing habits change with the flowering of different plants. In fall he seems to like dried plants and dried grass.



*Sydney talks with her tortoise friend, Milton, by Carol von Michaelis*

Drinking. Encourage your tortoise to drink and soak by placing it in its water dish. Be sure the dish is large enough for the whole tortoise to soak in but the head easily sticks out of the water. Mine actually drank for several minutes this morning; he wouldn't have if I hadn't put him in his water.

See Estivation in column 2.



*Denton in his roses, by Joan Meyer*

## **July Tips from the Tortoise Care Calendar---and Why**

Have you been using your Tortoise Care Calendar? Although the year we produced it was 2010, the tips are perfect for every year. They are still available on the website and at meetings. Here are July's tips:

- "It's natural for tortoises to stay in burrows for days or weeks at a time in this hottest month" This period is called **estivation**. When the weather cools, your tortoise will return to its normal behavior.
- "Have a vet check for parasites" It can take weeks or even months to treat a tortoise. If needed, start now so the course of treatment will be finished before brumation
- "Pick up any paper bits, plastic bags, and shiny things" Tortoises will ingest a brightly colored object thinking it's a flower
- "Save cantaloupe seeds and plant for your tortoise" Put in ground and keep moist. Most disappear as soon as they come up!
- "Pick up scats daily or at least before watering where tortoises eat" Keep the eating area free from germs
- "Practice reflecting light into the burrow with a mirror" Learn this technique so you can keep tabs on your tortoise. A flashlight is not nearly as bright!

## Tortoise Group Volunteers

### Czar of Booklets, Richard Knapp

How do all those Tortoise Group care booklets get to the vets' offices, libraries, and pet stores? A staff of 8-10 volunteers each keeps a section of the city stocked. And who manages those distributors? Richard Knapp. And where do you suppose we stored the 10,000 copies? In his garage! After 15 years of organizing and managing the network of dedicated volunteers, Richard is retiring.



**Richard Knapp, Czar of Pamphlets and MegaDiet Bagging Specialist, receives a lovely tortoise plate from Chairman Kathy Utiger with many thanks for years of outstanding service to Tortoise Group.**

You know Richard if you have volunteered for MegaDiet Bagging. He is that quiet, smiling man who often single handedly opens all the bags and keeps the scoopers supplied, while also moving, taping, and loading the filled boxes. Whew!



### Tortoise Group Bagging June 27

In the heat of the summer Tortoise Group is grateful to Katie Decker who offered the use of Bracken Elementary School for bagging. Because the air conditioning goes off at noon, we started early on a Wednesday morning. In two hours the last box was out the door to storage (see photos below).

Thank you to this hard-working crew who handled the bagging so very well: Mayrene Roberts, DeAnn and Timothy Olsen, Kirk Thorndike, Kathy Rice, Jana Thompson, Rick Brattain, Georgi Shalhoob, Jeff and Dee Dee Neal, Debbie Forbush, Leigh Ellis, Nancy Thompson-Jones, Mimi and Barclay Wilson, Brooke and Paige Timothy, Crissa Mae Boyo, Lea and Don Knisley, Deborah Goldman, Wende Lestelle, Nancy Crenshaw, Kathy Utiger, Pauline Antonakos, Trilla Newton, Bob Furtek, Katie Decker, Sharon Goldman, Kym Dumovich, Louise Locke, Don Piet. Special thanks to Don Knisley who hoisted box after box and also moved the contents of the storage unit as if it were nothing!



### **Volunteer of the Year 2011, Brian Morgan**

When you need someone to do a job, Brian Morgan is your man. That's been my experience. Who did I call to buy materials and take them to the women's prison? When we built shelving for the storage unit, who hefted all those heavy pieces? Need staff for a fair, help setting up and tearing down a meeting? Who handles ALL the boxes of MegaDiet and oversees their storage? Brian Morgan, of course. And Sandy Morgan is always there, too. Finally leaving after a very long day of MegaDiet bagging in January Brian, suffering from a nasty cold, stuck his head back in the room and said, "if there is anything at all that you need or anything that I can do, please let me know." What a guy! That's our volunteer of the year for 2011.



**Volunteer of the Year, Brian Morgan, accepts a special tortoise plate from Chairman Kathy Utiger with thanks for many years of exceptional service.**

### **May Saw Tortoise Month at the Springs Preserve**

Tortoise Group went all out to train volunteers and to develop interesting and educational interactive displays for our weekends at the Springs Preserve. For large crowds we staffed two displays, and for others just one. The Springs placed us right where we were seen by arriving visitors. **Our informed volunteers spoke with more than 2,000 adults**, surely making major strides in furthering tortoise education. Each Saturday and Sunday, we gave a class on having a tortoise as a pet. Thank you to our many volunteers: Diane Henry, Seanna Larson; Steven, Sharon, and Debbie Goldman; Janina Little; Brian and Sandy Morgan; Mandy Nicholson; Kathy Rice; Laura Deitsch; Kim Noble; Mayrene Roberts; Wende Lestelle; Sherri Graves; Bobbi Papadopulo; Pauline Antonakos; Beth Tomica-Hewitt; Bob Furtek; Kathy Utiger; Trilla Newton; Erick and Darci Gurule; Kiki Marcus Calhoun; Deanna Ojeda; Nancy In; Marv Stevens, and Jerry Shupe (also Ashley and Spot).



**Bobbi Papadopulo and Bob Furtek describe a tortoise to children at the Springs Preserve**



**Diane Henry and Janina Little set up the popular Tortoise Food Challenge game**

**A Word from the Chairman** It's thanks to these wonderful volunteers and the many others that Tortoise Group can offer educational programs, adoptions, fairs, meetings, a Hotline. Your effort is greatly appreciated.

## 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, July 28, 1-3 pm**

### General Meeting

**The Natural History of the Wild Desert Tortoise:  
How They Adapted to Survive the Harsh  
Environment**

by [Phillip A. Medica](#), MS, Herpetologist, USGS

The general biology of what wild desert tortoises do, the kinds of burrows that they make, where they make them, what they eat, what kinds of behavior they exhibit, i.e. fighting, mating, feeding, reproduction, threats, parasites, and disease.

### Quick Tip: Marking Your Tortoise

Learn how to put an exterior label with your phone number on your tortoise in case it escapes.

MegaDiet and other tortoise items are for sale at all meetings. If you wish a 20# sack, please let us know ahead of time.

### Future Meetings:

- Saturday, August 25, 1-3 pm
- Saturday, September 22, 1-3 pm  
“Hatchlings and Brumation” by Kathy Utiger

Meeting updates by email and on the website

### Why Become a Tortoise Group Member?

Besides supporting the work of Tortoise Group to “improve the lives of wild and captive desert tortoises through education,” there are some other benefits to being a member each year. The board has developed a price for Tortoise Group services:

	Members	Nonmembers
Snooper Service	\$10	\$20
Yard Consultation	\$10	\$20
Transfer of		
male tortoise	\$10	\$25
MegaDiet	\$6/bag	\$10/bag

### Heavy Summer Rains

Prepare now for the monsoon rain that may come in July-August. Be sure the drainage pattern in your yard is away from the tortoise burrow. If not, do some trenching now.

If you're home at the beginning of a big downpour, dash out and throw a plastic tarp over the burrow. You may have to hold it down with some heavy rocks or wood. When the rains end, quickly uncover the burrow. Otherwise, you create a greenhouse effect, trapping heat inside the burrow.

### Why Does My Tortoise Hiss?

That sound you hear that you may think is a hiss is really just the opposite. When a tortoise is frightened, it quickly pulls in its head forcing air out of its lungs. This quick exhalation of air sounds like a hiss. Tortoises do make sounds, they tell us, but we can't hear them.

### Adoption Information Published

The [Las Vegas Pet Scene Magazine](#) has two very nice pieces on Tortoise Group adoption. It's available online and at markets in Las Vegas.

### Send Tortoise Photos Please!

Make photos colorful and safe, examples of good tortoise care, feeding, and safety.

[kathyutiger@tortoisegroup.org](mailto:kathyutiger@tortoisegroup.org)

**New Aboveground Burrow Design**

This new design removes worry from custodians because they can always see the tortoise. It will not flood or collapse, it's fairly easy to build, and the insulation is adequate for our climate. It's not ideal for growing tortoises—solution coming. The cost is about \$175, depending upon what materials you have on hand. Complete directions on our [website](#).



-----  
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**

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

**3. Check amount you wish 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 Sherri Graves

Treasurer Trilla Newton

**Members**

Laura Deitsch, Wende Lestelle

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



**Steven and Sharon Goldman (and Spot) host the Tortoise Group class "A Dinosaur in Your Back Yard" at the Springs Preserve in May**

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