

Tortoise Group Newsletter

Tortoise Group
A non-profit organization since 1982

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www.TortoiseGroup.org

Las Vegas, Nevada

Pet Tortoise Pickup Service Closes

The Desert Tortoise Conservation Center won't be picking up more than 1,000 tortoises this year in the Las Vegas area. (Half of those were hatchlings!) The service has closed due to lack of funding. So what now? What if you have to move or if you want to separate a breeding pair?

1. Find a responsible person who will prepare a good habitat (we can help). Have the new custodian register the tortoise on the Tortoise Group website.
2. If it's a male, put it on the Tortoise Group list of tortoises for adoption. More on page 8.
3. Take it to The Animal Foundation, 655 N. Mojave Road, Las Vegas, 89101. (At this time we're unsure of the protocol from there. Males may be adoptable.)

Spring Tortoise Behavior

Basking. When your tortoise emerges from brumation, it will most likely bask and bask. It needs to warm up its body enough to be able to move about and eventually browse. That may take a few days or weeks.

Feeding. When your tortoise is finally browsing, offer some food—not before.

Soaking. When it's warmed up, place the tortoise in a shallow pan of lukewarm water. It lost a good deal of moisture over the winter and will need to replenish it. It may drink for 2-30 minutes.

Sleeping outside. In spring, your tortoise may decide to sleep under a low bush rather than return to the cold burrow.

As the weather warms, your tortoise will need to spend less time basking and can do more browsing. Spring is the optimum time for a tortoise to be outside doing tortoise things. As the weather heats up, the tortoise will need to retreat to the burrow

sooner and sooner and have less time to browse and interact with you!

March 23 Meeting ---A Feast of Freebies!

March Meeting Giveaways:

- Spineless cactus pad from Mandy Nicholson
- Clover seeds from Mark Martin
- Cactus Joe's Tortoise Seed Mix
- Hollyhock seeds from Deb Forbush
- Dandelion seeds from Kathy Utiger
- A beautiful tortoise plant from Tortoise Group

Spring is the perfect season to put in some fresh plants for your tortoise. The best time to start is right now. You can plant seeds or find some [plants from our list](#) that tortoises like.

Learn about tortoise translocation in Nevada at the March 23 Meeting. See page 6 for details



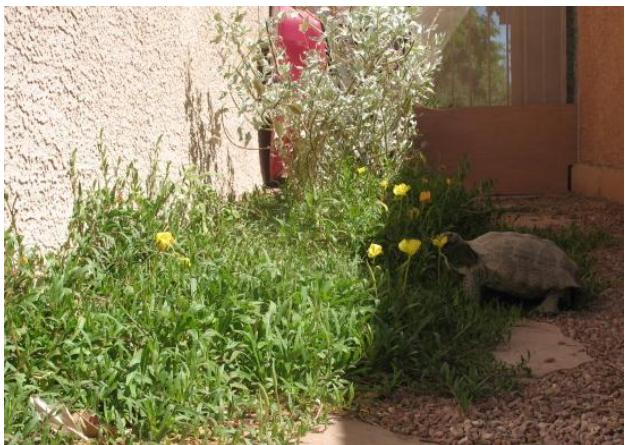
This adult desert tortoise released in a translocation project near Las Vegas carries a radio-transmitter. Biologists from the San Diego Zoo can track it to find out about its health and survival. The tortoise also has a GPS logger (on the tortoise's left) that gives precise information about its movements. Photo by Simon Madill, NDOW

MegaDiet Bagging Day March 16

Check your email for details

Signup: Sherri sherri376@aol.com or 339-9821

MegaDiet Corner



Tad browses on his patch of trailing yellow primrose every morning. Some days he gets MegaDiet, too.

MegaDiet and Emergence

When your tortoise emerges from brumation, let it bask and warm up for days or even weeks before feeding. When it's moving around and browsing, that's the time to offer MegaDiet.

Check out some of these topics on the [website](#)

- 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?

MegaDiet Tip

Isn't it fun watching tortoises eat? That cute, pink tongue. Chomping with gusto. This year, try watching your tortoise browse on those lovely plants you have put in. After all the best blossoms have disappeared and the tortoise has really been browsing, that's the time to offer some MegaDiet. Don't even feed MegaDiet every day. That way the tortoise will get a nicely mixed diet of plants and prepared food. And it won't be depending on you to arrive with a meal every day.

MegaDiet satellite Sellers

Please call sellers for appointment

Check website for new Satellite Seller locations

Nellis & Owens	Georgi - 459-1274
Ann & Camino al Norte	Don - 374-2466
Decatur & Gowan	Toni - 277-6179
Smoke Ranch & Michael Way	Julie - 245-4671
215 & Far Hills	Kathy & Pauline - 804-0472
Rainbow & Charleston (new)	Jamie - 232-6289
Charleston & Casino Center	

Business Locations (Member price not available—tax added to price)

<i>Creature Comforts Animal Hospital</i>	658-7339
Ann Rd and US95	Price: \$14
<i>Lone Mountain Animal Hospital</i>	645-3116
Rainbow & US95	Price: \$10
<i>Moon Sun Landscapes</i>	645-2032
Russell & Boulder Hwy	Price: \$10

A 1½ lb bag costing a member \$6.00 and a nonmember \$10.00 lasts a large desert tortoise at least one month. MegaDiet is also sold at Tortoise Group meetings.

40% discount to TG members

Volunteer BBQ a Big Success!

Thirty-four of the more than 100 fabulous volunteers took time out to celebrate Tortoise Group's achievements in 2012. Asking in what ways each person was involved gave us an overview of the many Tortoise Group projects and how each person has a skill to offer.

Big thanks to **Sherri and Gary Graves** for hosting a wonderful, relaxing, tortoise-filled BBQ. We sat about in their lovely back yard and feasted on the delights brought by our wonderful volunteers.

Tortoise Group thanks for 2012 go to long-time volunteers **Susan Stater** and **Jerry Shupe**. Each woman received a big round of applause and a gift card. The group was impressed by the years and years in which both of these women have enjoyed being an important part of Tortoise Group.



Volunteers enjoy a beautiful October afternoon BBQ at the home of Sherri and Gary Graves

Susan Stater has been a board member/officer of Tortoise Group since its first days in the early 1980's. Recent health issues forced her to retire from the Board. However, Susan is the person who continues to fulfill all the online orders of MegaDiet and other goods. That was 808 bags of MegaDiet in 2012 alone! Like many TG volunteers, she works by herself at her home all year long. She does have the support of her daughter Erin and husband Rick for backup and muscle.



Chairperson Kathy Utiger (L) presents Susan Stater with a gift card in thanks for her long-term volunteer dedication to Tortoise Group

Jerry Shupe has been Tortoise Group's go-to adoption and yard consultation person for roughly 20 years. Since the passing of Betty Burge, Jerry has handled the entire load herself! Hundreds of Las Vegas tortoise custodians have relied on Jerry to fix habitat problems, be available to answer tortoise questions, and just to be there over the years for them. You have a question? Call Jerry, she'll know the answer or she'll come right over to fix it. Sadly, Jerry has recently resigned from her position as Habitat Specialist. Tortoise Group and many tortoise custodians will greatly miss her expertise.

Translocation Research: Moving Wildlife in the Right Direction
By Dr. Jen Germano, San Diego Zoo's Institute for Conservation Research
and the Desert Tortoise Conservation Center
Photos by San Diego Zoo Staff

In the tortoise world here in the Southwest, we hear about translocations quite a bit both as a tool to aid in the recovery of threatened wild populations and as a mitigation tool to help minimize the damage done to wild populations through the habitat destruction. According to the World Conservation Union the official definition of a translocation is "any intentional movement of wildlife from one location with release in another."

Worldwide, translocations are happening with many kinds of plants and animals, but what many people don't realize is that the majority of these translocations fail. In fact, global reviews of wildlife translocations have shown that only 20-40% of translocations are actually successes. Furthermore, translocations carry with them great risks - not only directly to the animals which are actually being moved (these individuals often face higher mortality and stress rates than normal) but also to the wild populations to which these animals are released. For example, in Europe, populations of the highly endangered Mallorcan midwife toad are thought to have crashed due to the deadly chytrid fungus which was probably introduced unknowingly into the wild populations from captive animals.

Despite these risks, translocations that are carried out to rigorous standards and utilizing a variety of knowledge about a species' biology and its ecosystem can be a huge boost to conservation efforts. One example of this is the California condor. This spectacular bird was down to only 22 individuals in the wild in 1987 and on a sure path to extinction. Through the amazing efforts of the San Diego and LA Zoos, these birds were bred in captivity and then translocated back to the wild. There are currently over 400 California condors with more than half of these amazing and long-lived creatures flying free in the wild.

Like the California condor, wild desert tortoise populations are facing numerous threats in the wild. In 1990, the US Fish and Wildlife Service determined that wild populations had dropped so drastically that these animals needed to be listed as a threatened species. Today, disease threats and habitat destruction still put tortoise populations at risk. Groups such as the San Diego Zoo and US Fish and Wildlife Service as well as several universities are studying ways in which translocations can play a part in the recovery of these keystone desert species.



A juvenile tortoise carries a radio tracking device. This little guy was released and tracked as part of the Desert Tortoise Conservation Center's research-based translocations at the Nevada Test Site.

At the Desert Tortoise Conservation Center in Las Vegas, we have been working on researching methods to help improve translocations for several years. All our animals undergo strict and rigorous health evaluations by our veterinarians and trained medical staff to make sure that we are not introducing new disease-causing pathogens to the wild. This is especially important when working with ex-captive animals that may have picked up diseases or parasites during their time in captivity;

this is also part of the reason it is illegal to release pet tortoises into the wild.



Volunteer Cayenne Engel helps with a desert tortoise translocation in 2012

We also consider numerous genetic and behavioral aspects that help to ensure that our animals are not going to negatively impact wild populations and to help give our tortoises the best chance of survival in the wild. Furthermore, we have been testing numerous factors such as the effects of habitat (desert features such as flats, washes, and caliche caves) and tortoise personality to see how they influence the success rates of translocations.

The information we are learning can be used to help future translocations of tortoises into the wild to make sure we have the best chance of aiding in the survival of wild populations so that future generations will be able to enjoy a desert that is still home to these special creatures.



Dr. Jen Germano prepares to release a tortoise for translocation. Many of the animals carry radio-transmitters for study of their movements and survival. Knowing what impacts tortoise translocation can improve future work.

Photos from Members

Send yours to kathyutiger@tortoisegroup.org



Fred the tortoise and Jake are buddies. Jake actually protects Fred. Photo by Carol Ennis

Spring Events

Saturday, March 23, 1-3 pm

A Long Way from Home: Translocations as a Conservation Tool for Desert Tortoises

By Jen Germano, PhD

Jen will talk about wildlife translocations for conservation and the research by the Desert Tortoise Conservation Center to help improve translocations as a management tool for wild desert tortoise populations.

Jen has been working in Nevada with tortoise translocation and tortoise monitoring for the past several years. Check this [RJ article](#) about her work at the Nevada Test Site

Quick Tip: Early Spring Care

- When to start feeding
- Soaking
- Health checkup
- Browsing

A bonanza of freebies for you !!!

A free tortoise plant, cactus pads, hollyhock and clover seeds, and Cactus Joe's seeds mix!

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

All General Meetings

1 – 3 pm

Las Vegas Library

833 Las Vegas Boulevard North

Las Vegas, NV 89101

Right across from Cashman Center



Meeting updates by email and on the website

Sunday, April 28, 9:30 – noonish

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

You've heard a lot about the DTCC lately, no doubt. Don't miss this unique opportunity to visit this facility that is not open to the public. Lori Scott, Research Associate, will introduce us to DTCC procedures and clinics. Then we'll hike through the outlying pen areas (tour over uneven desert terrain for $\frac{1}{2}$ mile). With warm April we should see lots of tortoises large and small. A wonderful presentation of photos from last year's field trip can be found on the Tortoise Group Home page.

- 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**

Note: not appropriate for small children and not accessible for the handicapped

Email Kathy at KathyUtiger@TortoiseGroup.org to sign up.

Plants, Plants, Plants

Dandelions

Right now the dandelions flowers are lush. If you see some go to seed and you know they were grown without pesticides or other nasty chemicals, collect the seeds. Plant using [these guidelines](#). Once one plant is established, they'll spread. Dandelions are very nutritious - both the flowers and the leaves.

Hollyhocks – from Deb Forbush

Germinate these seeds using a lot of mulch with little irrigation right now and daily in summer.

Globe Mallow Story – Jayne and Mike LaFavor

The College of Southern Nevada in Henderson gave Tortoise Group these wonderful Globe Mallows. We planted the cut up plant..and for 2 years it exploded into the most amazing plant with coral-colored dainty flowers on it. Thank you CSN for the plants that tortoises could eat and thrive on.

We feed our Myrtle as needed the natural plants that southern Nevada provides. What a wonderful

landscape plant plus a natural food source for our desert friends. Of course..Mega Diet is the best..Myrtle has been in our family since 1964. We introduced him to Mega Diet....and he was not a fan at first..but now..he runs when he sees me coming to feed him. Thank you Tortoise Group for keeping my tortoise healthy and FED! LOL He is an old man and we love him very much.



Globe mallow growing lush and edible
Photo by Jayne LaFavor

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 2013

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

3. Check amount you wish for your 1-year membership

- \$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

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

Creating Peace in Your Habitat

We know that two tortoises living together usually will not work out. You'll have either breeding or fighting. A male will often constantly harass a female, causing her to hide out in her burrow. Two males, and often females, will fight. The solution is to give your male to Tortoise Group for adoption to another family (sorry, no females because they could breed). To put your boy on the list, contact Kathy at KathyUtiger@TortoiseGroup.org or 281-2719.



**Bird (as in Larry Bird),
who grew up with
longtime Life Member
Marilyn Benoit,
recently was adopted
by a family with two
children and moved
into a beautiful new
lush habitat.**

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