

# Tortoise Group Newsletter

Tortoise Group  
A non-profit organization since 1982

Volume XXVI No. 2 May 2013

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

Las Vegas, Nevada

## New Nevada Law Causes Confusion

Overbreeding of pet tortoises has been a big problem in southern Nevada for years, diverting funds from important tortoise research to caring for unwanted pets. In response, Nevada Administrative Code 503-093 has been amended to say, "A person possessing a desert tortoise...shall not possess more than one desert tortoise."

So where's the confusion? "**This new regulation affects only those people who seek to adopt or acquire a desert tortoise after May 1, 2013,**" said Cris Tomlinson, diversity biologist for the Nevada Department of Wildlife.

Take action to make your tortoise(s) legally yours by registering them on the [Tortoise Group website](http://www.tortoisegroup.org). The only tortoises that were actually legal up to now were those acquired before the tortoise was listed as Endangered on August 4, 1989, and those officially adopted through Tortoise Group.

Don't worry. If you have tortoises, please continue to love them and take good care of them. Make sure they are legal by registering them on the Tortoise Group website.



Terra loves her MegaDiet! Photo by Jamie Lee

## MegaDiet RF (ReFormulated) Arrives!

Tortoise Group is excited to bring you a new formula of MegaDiet, one with more fiber and less protein than Original MegaDiet. Recent information has shown that Original MegaDiet contains a balance of protein and fiber that may promote an unhealthy rate of fast growth. You may recall that we advised of this situation last year while we were researching other foods.

MegaDiet RF may be fed as often as you wish, but we still suggest that you feed you tortoise 2-3 times per week and allow it to browse the rest of the time.

Original MegaDiet will remain available online and at Satellite Seller locations while supplies last.

Check online on the MegaDiet page for a video on preparing MegaDiet RF. Other details on page 2.



New MegaDiet RF in 10-pound sack and 19-ounce bag.

## Looking for Some Volunteers

- Make short videos for website
- Help set up meetings
- Join the Adoption Team
- Staff the Hotline
- Give legal advice occasionally
- Help with a tortoise curriculum for 4th graders
- Be our Volunteer Coordinator

Contact Kathy if one of these volunteer opportunities sounds like you

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

## MegaDiet RF Corner

### Introducing MegaDiet RF (reformulated)!!

MegaDiet RF is a high-fiber, low-protein diet perfect for desert tortoises. This formula contains the proper balance of protein and fiber a tortoise needs, along with all the vitamins and minerals. Serve this diet to tortoises large and small in a juicy mash that tortoises find very tasty. Keep a supply of fresh water handy in the habitat.

### Very Important Note

Always serve MegaDiet RF as a juicy mash because of all the fiber. Never serve dry pellets.

### Why the Change in Formulas?

Recent information has shown that Original MegaDiet contains a balance of protein and fiber that may promote an unhealthy rate of fast growth.



MegaDiet RF softened with water into a juicy mash is formed into a wedge for easy biting. Yuummy!!

### Quantity and Pricing

For MegaDiet RF only, the Board is moving back to the pre-recession pricing of \$8 for members and \$12 for nonmembers. Original MegaDiet will remain at \$6 and \$8, respectively.

MegaDiet RF is available in two sizes: a 19-ounce bag (actually filled to 22 oz), and a handy 10-pound sack (\$50 – members, \$65 – nonmembers).

Read [MegaDiet RF Information Sheet](#)  
View [Video on preparing MegaDiet RF](#)

## 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 |  |
|                            | Trilla at Ace Locksmiths: 528-2237       |
| 215 & W Tropicana          | Athena – 682-0307                        |
| 215 & S. Decatur           | Carolyn – 534-7888 x824<br>378-6514 cell |
| Russell & Pecos (new)      | Sherri – 339-9821                        |
| 215 & S. Eastern           | Helene – 878-7877 w<br>375-7998 cell     |
| Boulder Hwy & Equestrian   | Gail – 334-0015                          |
| 215 & 95 at Van Wagenen    | Peggy – 281-3048                         |
| Boulder City               | Carol – 293-6494                         |
| Pahrump                    | Sheri – 775-727-5557                     |
| Kingman, AZ                | Toni – 928-757-8317                      |

Shop the [OnLine Store](#)

No computer? Call Susan – 702-458-8382

**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 |

*MDRF not yet available at businesses*

**33% discount to TG members**

## When Bonnie Becomes Buster

### What happened to My Sweet Tortoises?

This question arises each spring as tortoises emerge from brumation. Over the winter one tortoise has grown to sexual maturity size, and harmony has disappeared in the habitat. Sometimes it's a large tortoise that attacks a smaller one and other times a small one takes after a large one. The behavior is often violent, with biting, jabbing of gular horns, and flipping. It's important to separate the tortoises immediately to avoid a death.

### A typical email:

*I'm a member of Tortoise Group and need some advice please. I have two male tortoises – brothers that are about 8 years old. They were born and raised in captivity and given to me about 4 years ago. They have always cohabitated well, with just an occasional bobbing of heads.*

*This year, one emerged about 3 weeks before the other. Since the second has come out, the two have been fighting constantly. Very aggressively. I don't know what to do but separate them throughout the day! I have never seen them do this before! A few times yesterday, one of them "won" the fight against the other and the other "ran" across the yard to get away only to return 30 minutes later and do it again. Any advice you can offer would be appreciated. Thank you, Susan Russell*



**#1 and #2 (actual names) square off this year for the first time. They became sexually aware on emergence. They will continue to fight, possibly to death, unless separated.** Photo by Susan Russell

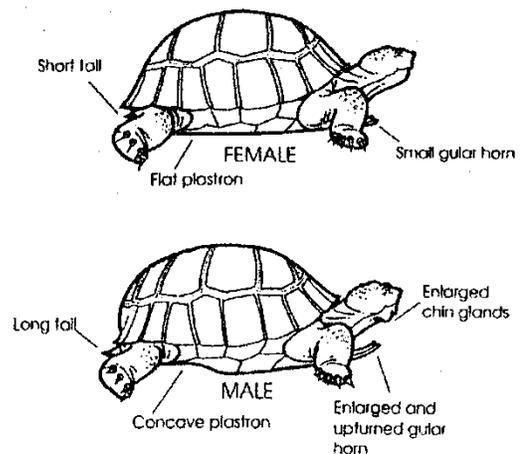
### When do tortoises become sexually active?

Usually sexual maturity occurs when a tortoise is about 8 inches in shell length. It's the shell length, not the age, that's important. A well-fed tortoise will grow faster and reach 8 inches in length before a tortoise with little to eat.

### How can I tell a male from a female?

At first all tortoises look like females with a flat plastron (bottom shell). At about 8 inches in shell length, a male begins to have a slightly concave area at the rear end of the shell. This area deepens with age, his gular horn lengthens and becomes upturned, his chin glands grow, and his tail is longer than a female's.

### *Gopherus agassizii*



**Male tortoises show several differences from females. Females have long rear nails for digging the nest.**

### Can Two Females Live Together?

Only sometimes. If you start your habitat with two tortoises, chances are that you will have to give up one. The solution is to start with just one tortoise. They are natural loners yet love interacting with you and your pets.

**Help curb overbreeding!  
Separate the sexes**

## Do You Have a Male You Have to Give Up? Re-Home Your Tortoise

Male tortoises can find new homes again through the Tortoise Group Adoption Program. Are your males fighting or do you have a mating pair? Put your male on the list to be adopted to someone who is excited about having one beautiful tortoise. The new custodian will go through our regular adoption program, so your precious tortoise can be assured of having a safe, healthy habitat. Only males are adopted to avoid the possibility of breeding.

Preference is given to Life Members, then Members, and finally to nonmembers. Add your tortoise to the list by emailing [KathyUtiger@TortoiseGroup.org](mailto:KathyUtiger@TortoiseGroup.org) or calling 702-281-2719. A fee of \$10 for members, \$25 for nonmembers

## What Do I Do with Females and Small Tortoises?

With the Pet Tortoise Pickup Service no longer available due to lack of funds, how do we deal with tortoises we can no longer handle in our back yards?

### Prevention

- Stop breeding
- Decline to take in tortoises friends offer you Where to take them...
- Find someone who can take a tortoise. Refer them to Tortoise Group to help with the habitat
- As a last resort, you can turn tortoises in at The Animal Foundation (formerly Lied) 655 N Mojave. The tortoises are not euthanized. At this time, tortoises not adopted (males only) go to the Desert Tortoise Conservation Center.

## Late Spring Tortoise Behavior

**Egg laying.** In late May and June, females will lay their eggs. Some females lay infertile eggs all their lives, whether they have ever been with a male or not. Females may seem restless and start pacing more than normal looking for a place to dig a nest.

If your female lays eggs, be careful not to turn her upside down. The oviducts containing eggs could twist causing the eggs to be trapped in an oviduct like a sausage.

The egg-laying process takes several hours. The female digs the nest and then squats over it to push out and cover the eggs. If your female is straining and seeming unable to produce the eggs, it would be time to visit the vet.

## Having a Veterinarian's Name Handy

Let's hope you never have a tortoise medical emergency, but my experience on the Hotline tells me that it happens all the time. It's best to take your tortoise to a vet that has experience treating tortoises. Be prepared; check our list of [veterinarians who say they treat tortoises](#).

You might want to check out the vet by taking your tortoise in for a checkup if you have never done so.



**Our lady munching on rose petals.** Photo by Angie Threlfall

## See YOUR Tortoise's Picture Here!

Send cute photos with lots of color showing safe conditions to [kathyutiger@tortoisegroup.org](mailto:kathyutiger@tortoisegroup.org)

**Be legal. Register your tortoise at  
Tortoise Group.org**

## Field Trip to the Desert Tortoise Conservation Center April 28, 2013, a perfect day for a field trip in Las Vegas

Staff answered lots of tortoise questions.



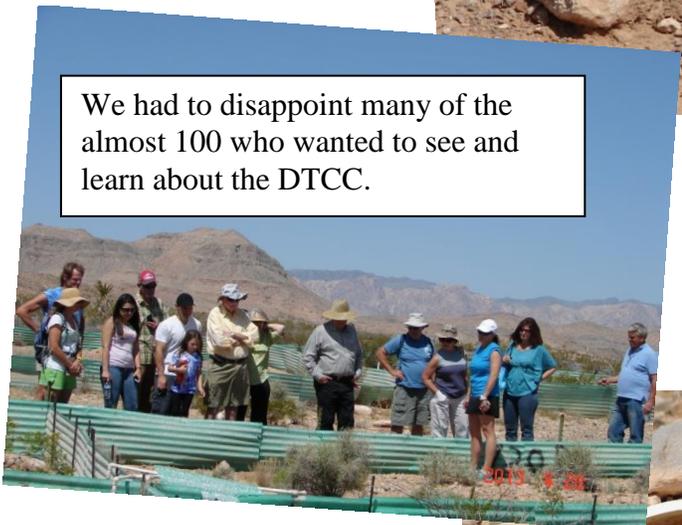
Hatchling pens have special protection from predators



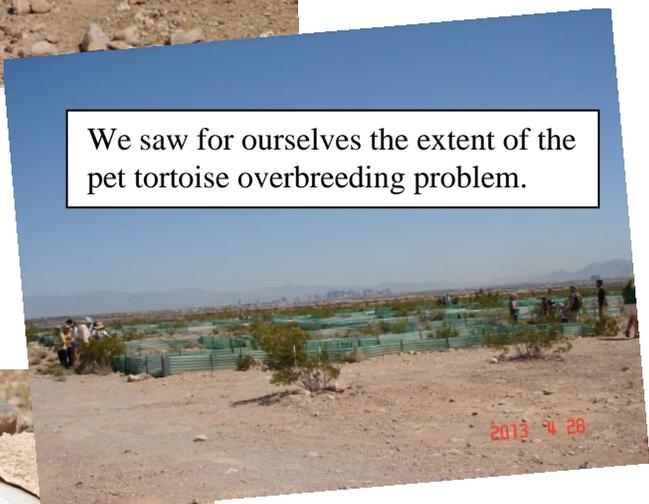
Tortoises came out to say



We had to disappoint many of the almost 100 who wanted to see and learn about the DTCC.



We saw for ourselves the extent of the pet tortoise overbreeding problem.



Awwwww!



Photos by Mandy Nicholson

## Early Summer Events

### Saturday, May 25, 1-3 pm How YOUR Plants Can Thrive in YOUR Garden!

By Norm Schilling, certified arborist

Whether it's tortoise plants, desert plants or more traditional ones, Norm Schilling will give you some of the fundamentals of how to grow them successfully in our climate.

Don't miss Norm's Tips on:

- Gardening without pesticides
- Getting rid of ants and aphids
- Keeping beneficial predator insects in your yard
- And many more!

Norm's presentation will be fun, interactive and full of useful information.

### Gifts to Grow from Norm:

- Packets of his custom-blended wildflower seeds
- Thornless Cow's Tongue pads
- Indian Fig Cactus pads

Bring your extra plants to share - globe mallow, Mexican Evening Primrose, dandelion or other seeds. Let's share!

### Quick Tip: Early Summer Care

- Egg laying
- What sex is my tortoise?
- Rain behavior

Original MegaDiet and MegaDiet RF in the regular bag and the 10# sack and other tortoise items are for sale at all meetings.

### Mark TG Meetings on Your Calendar

Saturday June 22  
Saturday July 13-Master Desert Tortoise Workshop  
Saturday, July 20  
Saturday, August 24  
Saturday, September 28

Looking for a special event or a specific speaker?  
Please let us know: email Mandy at [mlnicholson03@cox.net](mailto:mlnicholson03@cox.net)

### 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



Watch you email for announcements of:

- Tortoise Tips
- Special Adoption Meetings
- Fairs



Tortoise chomping a globe mallow  
Photo by N. Schilling

## Emergence and Worry

With the arrival of May, most tortoises have emerged from brumation. Some late risers may still be sleepy and resting under a bush instead of interacting with their custodians. Never fear! Before long they will be browsing and snooping around the habitat.

Here was my advice to the many who emailed me concerned that their tortoise was dead or trapped:

### Avoiding worry in the future:

Know when to expect to see your tortoise

- Keep a log of brumation and emergence dates. Is the tortoise really late?

If you can see the tortoise in the burrow

- Check for any obstructions or cave-ins
- Could the burrow have gotten muddy and that mud dried to a cement-like consistency?
- Poke the tortoise gently with a PVC pipe or fishing pole. Listen carefully for the sound of movement or a “hiss,” which is really just a surprised exhalation of breath.

You know the tortoise’s emergence date and it’s already 3 weeks late:

- **Dig it up!**  
One woman found her tortoise had dug itself into a spot where it was trapped. It’s OK now!



**Mr T rests next to his buckwheat bush after worrying his custodian by coming out later than expected.** Photo by Kevin Altringer

Cut Here

| <b>Tortoise Group Membership Form</b>  |  |                |
|--|--|----------------|
| Memberships and contributions may be tax deductible  |  |                |
| <b>1. Please Print the COMPLETE address</b>  |  |                |
| Name _____   | Phone _____  |                |
| Address _____  |  |                |
| City _____   | State _____  | Zip Code _____ |
| E-mail _____   |  |                |
| <b>2. Check One Newsletter Option      2013</b>  | <b>3. Check amount you wish for your 1-year membership</b>   |                |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Send my newsletter by e-mail  | <input type="checkbox"/> \$25 <input type="checkbox"/> \$35 <input type="checkbox"/> \$50 <input type="checkbox"/> \$75 <input type="checkbox"/> Life \$500<br>Special Contribution: _____ |                |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Send my newsletter in hard copy   |  |                |
| 40% discount on MegaDiet and 10% on other Tortoise Group goodies to members and their immediate families |  |                |
| <b>Make check payable to Tortoise Group. Mail with form to:</b>  |  |                |
| <b>Tortoise Group ♦ 1001 Adobe Flat ♦ Henderson, NV 89011</b>  |  |                |

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Mandy Nicholson

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

**Thank You Bob and Julie Berliner!**

After living peacefully together for years, suddenly this spring Winnebago (about 70 years old) began picking on his son, Terra (a boy). Then it escalated to fighting. The custodian, about to leave town, didn't see a solution. Bob and Julie Berliner had an empty habitat area due to a death and offered to take in Terra. Whether he stays permanently or not is uncertain. Thank you, caring custodians.

**Terra rests in his new habitat. Bob and Julie Berliner just happened to have an empty burrow right when Terra needed a new home.** Photo by Bob Berliner

