

Tortoise Group Newsletter



The Organization for the Protection of Nevada's Resident Tortoises, Inc.
A non-profit organization since 1982

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www.tortoisegroup.org

Las Vegas, Nevada

Stirrings in the Yard

By Betty Burge

During a recent rain, one of my small juveniles emerged, sought out a puddle and in very slow motion, drank and went back to its burrow. Several weeks ago, we had a few days of warm afternoon temperatures and I found the tracks of several tortoises.

The tortoises had awakened, moved about, and returned to the burrow by late afternoon. If they had been hungry, grass and flowers were available and the water dish is kept full. No need to worry about occasional awakenings and no need to

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offer food. They will be up soon enough in March or April.

Mojave Max Emergence Contest Launches

Students in Clark County school grades 1-12 are learning about the Mojave Max Emergence Contest at school assemblies with Jerry Shupe and others. Students guess the exact month, day, hour, and minute when the desert tortoise, Mojave Max, will emerge for the first time from his winter sleep. Mojave Max is now hibernating at the Red Rock Visitor Center. His Website is:

<http://www.ccsd.net/mojavemax>

What Did Density Research Show at the DTCC?

- **Tour the Desert Tortoise Conservation Center**

We have terrific tortoise meetings in March and April: an introduction to research at the DTCC by Kim Goodwin in March, followed by a field trip to the DTCC in April. Join the group! **It's a DTCC Special!!**

Newsletter Arrives by e-mail

Forty-one people will receive their Tortoise Group newsletters by e-mail beginning with this issue. The cost in money and trees is substantial. If you would care to help the savings, e-mail your name and phone number to Kathy Utiger at utiger@juno.com Please remember to let us know when you change your e-mail address.

Membership

Give a Tortoise Friend a Call

How many people do you know who have tortoises but do not know about Tortoise Group meetings and activities? Let them know that Tortoise Group has field trips, children's events, speakers on tortoises, picnics, and booths at fairs. There's something for everyone. Check out our schedule of events and give that friend a call.

Pay Membership Dues Now

Membership renewals are due January 1 of each year. We hope that you will continue to support Tortoise Group. The memberships and the sale of MegaDiet tortoise chow keep us functioning.

Annual Report Ready

The summary of Tortoise Group activities and financial status is available in the 2002 Annual Report. To receive a copy, send a SASE to Tortoise Group, 5157 Poncho Circle, Las Vegas, NV 89119

**Tortoise Adoptions
and Consultations
are Free
Call 739-8043**

The Public Asks... by Betty Burge

Q My tortoise will not eat MegaDiet. What can I do this year to help her accept MegaDiet?

A Most people have continued to give their tortoise vegetables alone in addition to sometimes adding MegaDiet to the vegetables. If you offer vegetables with no MegaDiet, your tortoise will hold out for her favorites. Until you consistently offer either straight MegaDiet, softened pellets, or MegaDiet mixed with shredded vegetables, your tortoise may never accept MegaDiet.

If you are growing plants that tortoises like and you have grass and dandelions, your tortoise will not starve before accepting MegaDiet. It may take a while, but your tortoise will accept MegaDiet if you stay away from plain vegetables.

Q During the winter, I place food in front of the tortoise burrow but it is never eaten. What's wrong?

A A healthy tortoise will usually sleep through the winter. It has stored enough fat during the spring and summer. In winter the metabolism and the rate of breathing and the heart beat are slowed. The tortoise is sleeping without

burning up much energy. The cold temperatures make it difficult for the tortoise to move about, and if any food were eaten it probably would not be digested. Sleeping through the cold weather is a good way to conserve energy when food is not available and moving is very, very difficult. There is no need to put out food for your tortoise.

Q Most of last summer my two females were fighting. They were actually shoving and apparently trying to overturn one another. One would chase the other and ram her repeatedly. What should I do? Will they get over it?

A Fighting between females does happen. Sometimes it comes and goes through the season. Sometimes it is continual. Either way you may find one of the tortoises on her back. If she cannot right herself and the temperature is high, she may die. So even if fighting is occasional, you should think about separating them permanently.

Watch and see if just one of them is the aggressor. That tortoise may act the same regardless of the age or sex of a second tortoise in the same yard. Since you cannot teach the tortoise to get along, you will need to think seriously

about either dividing your yard, if it is large enough to provide adequately for both tortoises, or parting with one of them. If you give the aggressive one to a friend or the Conservation Center, remember that she needs to live alone.

Q What can I use to kill weeds in my yard? There are too many weeds to dig up but I won't use a poison that could be hazardous to my tortoises.

A Mix 1 gallon of white vinegar, 2 cups of table salt, and 1 tablespoon of liquid detergent. Spray the solution on just the plant parts, if possible. Be careful where you spray, because this mixture will kill all plants. It is great for weedy cracks in driveways, and walkways. Used repeatedly, it will actually sterilize the soil so nothing will grow for a long time. A tortoise will probably avoid or eat very little. No harm done.

Information Directory

TG Hotline	739-8043
Clark County Hotline	383-TORT
Adoption	
Betty Burge	739-8043
School Programs	
Gail Cunningham	873-3500

Tortoise Group
5157 Poncho Circle
Las Vegas, NV 89119
702-793-8043

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The Tortoise Group newsletter is
published three times yearly:
March, May, and August

**Welcome Rain Causes
Collapsed Burrows**

by Betty Burge

Water-soaked roof soil may collapse on a tortoise as it sleeps. The soil may harden and trap the tortoise before you know it has happened. During and after heavy rains, watch for signs of collapse by checking the inside of the burrow. Use sunlight reflected from a mirror during the day and a flashlight at night.

Is the channel of your tortoise burrow straight so that the tortoise is usually visible when you check inside at other times? Has the tortoise dug beyond the plywood where there is no support for water-soaked soil? If the tortoise has turned a corner to extend the channel or

for other reasons you cannot see it when it is at the end, you may have to dig up the burrow to make sure the tortoise is not trapped under collapsed soil.

If the burrow is flooded, muddy, or roof soil has collapsed into the channel, you will need to remove the tortoise and place it in a cardboard box with a loose cover where it will remain cool (35 - 50 degrees F) until the tortoise awakens or you have dug another burrow and can place the tortoise in it.

Do not allow your tortoise to go back into a soaked burrow. It may take many weeks before the interior dries. If the tortoise is placed in a box and it awakens for the season, it must be allowed out of the box to be active in the yard.

A burrow may not be needed early in the spring. In fact, the tortoise may choose not to return to the cold burrow but sleep in a corner of the yard. During the day, there may be enough shade in your yard to protect the tortoises until the burrow interior is dry.

Think about digging a second burrow. Because of the nature of most local soils, if not loosened for some reason, it is usually so compacted that rain does not penetrate as far down as you would dig for another burrow, 20 inches for an adult or subadult. Expect the soil to be dry in a new

burrow.

To dry the interior of the burrow, remove the soil and plywood over the burrow and expose the interior on dry days. Be ready to protect the burrow from more rain by laying the plywood horizontally to the ground surface, covering the burrow interior. Add another piece of wood if necessary to cover the entire inside. Cover that plywood with plastic like a painter's drop cloth and weight it down.

Health Check

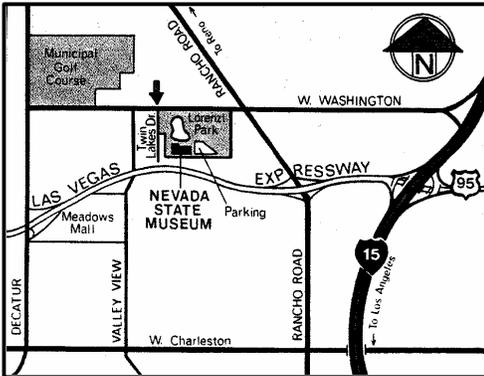
Spring emergence is a good time to check your tortoise: Eye lids should be open, not sunken or swollen. Nostrils dry and open. Shell and soft parts free of lesions and ticks. But also, look at the tongue and roof of the mouth for white, cheesy-like lesions. Spring is also a good time to weigh and measure, and to plant those dandelions. Write Tortoise Group for Information Sheet #13, "How to Transplant Dandelions." Include a self-addressed, stamped envelope.



Tad relaxes indoors

Spring Meetings and Fairs

March 15 **Tortoise Density Study at the Desert Tortoise Conservation Center**
Saturday **by Kim Goodwin, B.S. Zoology**
1 – 3 pm



How many tortoises can live within a certain area? What do researchers look for as indications of crowding? Results from the density study at the Desert Tortoise Conservation Center give some interesting answers.

Nevada State Museum and Historical Society
700 Twin Lakes Drive (in Lorenzi Park)
(No admission charge to folks attending the Tortoise Group meeting)

April 27 **Field Trip to the Desert Tortoise Conservation Center (DTCC)**
Sunday **by Michelle McDermott, DTCC Facility Manager**
9 am

Michelle will introduce us to the DTCC, its development, and describe some of the amazing research studies from past years. On a tour of the facility we will see research pens and learn about studies in progress. Refreshments on the patio will cap this fabulous field trip.

Dress for the desert. We will be walking on uneven ground in the hot sun. Wear sturdy walking shoes, sunscreen, a hat, and bring water.

Directions: From the corner of S. Rainbow and Blue Diamond, go south on Rainbow for 3.5 miles. After ¾ mile the road is unpaved but poses no problem for a normal sedan. You can't miss the DTCC.

Spring Fairs

Tortoise Group will participate in several fairs in April. Look for our booth at the following events:

EarthDay Birthday
April 12
Mission Hills Park
Henderson

EcoJam
April 19
10 – 4
Sunset Park

Clark County Fair
April 10 – 13
10 – 10 or 12 pm
(Times differ each day)
Logandale County Fairgrounds

Members' Corner

Turn Your Trash into Treasures for Jerry's Children's Tortoise Workshops

Jerry Shupe offers several tortoise craft workshops for children each year. Through brief skits and creative craft projects, Jerry teaches the basics about tortoises. Please bring items on the list below to general meetings to help Jerry provide neat stuff for the kids' crafts.

Craft materials needed

- Buttons (especially brown)
- Plastic yogurt and cottage cheese containers
- Tuna cans (clean & without lids)
- Paper egg cartons
- Buttons, sequins, glitter
- Pieces of ribbon, felt, lace
- Plastic tops of drink/water bottles
- River rocks, 4-6 inches
- Children's pails
- "Moss"
- Cardboard, thin (cereal boxes)

Join in the fun and the learning!
Plan now to bring your children to Jerry's July workshop.

The 50/50 Raffle Is Coming!!

Tortoise Group will hold a 50/50 raffle at each of the meetings at the Museum. Tickets will sell 6 for \$5 or \$1 each. The lucky winner will receive 50% of the money collected; 50% will go to Tortoise Group.

New T-shirts and Caps

That smash hit, the spruce-colored t-shirt was worn by volunteers who staffed booths at fairs last year. We finally caved in to requests and some for general sale. Buy your t-shirt and a cap with the Tortoise Group logo at the next meeting!

Annual Picnic a Huge Success

The annual Tortoise Group picnic in October fell on a beautiful day. Several members traveled from Pahrump to enjoy the tortoise talk and the scrumptious dishes. The event was a delight, as always.

Tortoise Group Honors Volunteers

Tortoise Group capped the holiday season with a festive potluck dinner to thank the hard-working volunteers for their many hours of service.



Tortoise Group members, families and friends talk tortoise at the Annual Tortoise Group Picnic in October.

Circle These Dates for Tortoise Group Events

- April 27 – Field Trip to the DTCC
- May 17 – Tour of Backyard Tortoise Habitats in LV
- July 19 – Children's Tortoise Craft Workshop
- August 16 – Toad Conservation
- September 20 – Annual Meeting
- October 19 – Tortoise Group Picnic

The Down Side of Helium-Filled Balloons

Tortoise Group is renewing its efforts to discourage the release of helium-filled balloons. These balloons travel for miles and may end up in the sea. They kill sea turtles, dolphins and whales that become filled the indigestible floating fragments mistaken for food. Releasing these balloons is just littering, delayed. Do your part and do not accept helium balloon giveaways or participate in mass releases. Do not purchase balloons for children to take outside. Too often balloons do not stay in the hands of youngsters.

Full House at the DTCC

The staff at the Desert Tortoise Conservation Center (DTCC) Holding Facility is expecting to release some tortoises in the spring. You know that through the years they have found that captive-raised tortoises survive as well as wild tortoises. However, no unauthorized person should release an unwanted tortoise; it is illegal. A seemingly healthy tortoise may be carrying a disease transmittable to other tortoises. Releasing that tortoise could release a time bomb of disease. Call the DTCC at 593-9027 for pickup of any unwanted pets tortoises or ones found wandering in the city streets.

Desert Tortoise Council Meets in Las Vegas

The 28th Annual Meeting and Symposium of the Desert Tortoise Council was held on February 21-23, 2003 at Sam's Town Hotel and Casino in Las Vegas. Sessions include results of ongoing and new research projects in Nevada; speeches by Dr. Dan Beck on Gila monsters and tortoises and Dr. Olivia Judson, author of Dr. Tatiana's Sex Advice to All Creation; a government panel on what is needed to help tortoise populations become self sustaining. Three field trips were offered on Monday to sites of tortoise interest. Abstracts are available at: <http://www.deserttortoise.org/>

<p>✂ ----- ✂</p> <p>Tortoise Group Membership - Contribution Form</p> <p>Memberships and contributions may be tax-deductible</p>		<p>(Please check)</p>
<p>Name _____</p>	<p>Phone () _____</p>	<p>Individual 15.00 _____</p>
		<p>Family 25.00 _____</p>
<p>Street _____</p>		<p>Sustaining 35.00 _____</p>
		<p>Sponsor 50.00 _____</p>
<p>City _____ State _____ ZIP _____</p>		<p>Corporate 75.00 _____</p>
		<p>Life 200.00 _____</p>
<p><input type="checkbox"/> Renewing member</p>		<p>Additional Contribution _____</p>
<p><input type="checkbox"/> New Member</p>		<p>Total Amount Enclosed _____</p>
<p>Except for Life members, memberships expire each Dec.31</p>		
<p>Make check payable to Tortoise Group. Mail check with application to: Tortoise Group, 5157 Poncho Circle, Las Vegas, NV 89119</p>		

Become a Volunteer!

You'll be appreciated if you:

- Sell MegaDiet
- Assist in digging burrows
- Staff booths at fairs
- Deliver Pamphlets
- Give educational presentations
- Help at meetings
 - Bring goodies
 - Be a Greeter
 - Help at the sales table

Call Betty for more information. Tortoise Group needs your participation. 739-8043.

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Websites of Interest

- Tortoise Group www.tortoisegroup.org
- Desert Tortoise Council www.deserttortoise.org
- California Turtle and Tortoise Club
www.tortoise.org
- Tortoise Trust (United Kingdom and the USA)
www.tortoisetrust.org
- American tortoise Rescue
(Southern California) www.tortoise.com
- Desert Tortoise Preserve Committee (California)
www.tortoise-tracks.org

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