

# 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](http://www.tortoisegroup.org)

Las Vegas, Nevada

## Wildfires and Tortoises

Recent wildfires in Las Vegas and other parts of Nevada burned through many acres of prime tortoise habitat. A team of biologists is currently planning the very large task of how best to assess the impact of the fires on tortoises and their habitat. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Bureau of Land Management, and Nevada Department of Wildlife are part of this team, which is called Burn Area Emergency Restoration (BAER). Securing meaningful data is always a challenge, and the large area involved and difficulty finding tortoises complicate any surveys.

Having time to move into deep burrows would help save tortoises. Past examples of burned tortoises have been rare. The dense expanses of invasive weeds result in hot fires that remain in one area longer than if only native plants were growing there. Some areas have burned in patchy configurations. The more unburned patches dispersed over the burn area the faster the recovery of the burned area. What plants come back is a question. Burns may enhance conditions for invasive weeds. Besides the resulting loss of tortoise food, the burning of rodent and rabbit food should theoretically increase the amount of predation by coyotes on their less preferred food source, the tortoise.

## Win \$\$\$

"What good is a tortoise, anyway?" Children and adults are invited to address this not-so-frivolous question in an original, legible article of no more than 250 words. Age categories are Child (under 10), Youth (11-18), and Adult (18+) with a limit of one entry per person. One person in each age

category will win \$25.00. Send your submission to Tortoise Group, 5157 Poncho Circle, Las Vegas, NV 89119 by September 8, 2005. Name, address, phone number, and age group should appear on a separate sheet accompanying the essay. The Board of Directors will judge the essays primarily on content. Grammar, punctuation, and spelling are secondary if the intent is considered clear. Winning essays will be announced at the September meeting and published in the 2006 Tortoise Group newsletters.



*"Hurry up! I can't hold this pose much longer"  
with "Dusty" by Frances Stratton of Las Vegas*

## Annual Meeting

The September meeting will feature a brief Annual Meeting of members, who are welcome to put forward ideas and issues for consideration.

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## Seasonal Tips

By Betty Burge

- **Prepare the baby pen, now,** if you have a female that you know laid eggs or may have laid. Instructions are in the Tortoise Group pamphlet on desert tortoise adoption and care, May 2003.
- **If your tortoise chooses not to sleep in its burrow**, it's all right. As long as the tortoise knows the burrow location, it will use the burrow if it needs to do so to regulate its body temperature. Sleeping under a shrub or on the patio may be sufficient at night, especially as the summer progresses.

**Tortoise Group**  
**5157 Poncho Circle**  
**Las Vegas, NV 89119**  
**702-739-8043**

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**Board of Directors**

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

- **Have those favorite drinking places ready** in the event of rain.
- **Tortoises often stay in their burrows for several days** at a time during the peak temperatures of summer. If the tortoise has accumulated too much potassium from vegetables and growing vegetation, it will probably stop eating until it can get a drink and flush its system. Your tortoise will not starve if it does not eat for days at a time, but helping it to drink may be just what it needs.
- **Male restlessness.** As testosterone levels increase in late summer, your male may become restless, traveling the edges of the property or resting in a standing up position against the walls. If he is living alone, don't worry. He will calm down. There's no need to find him a female. In the confines of your yard, nowhere near a wild tortoise's home range of more than 100 acres, the continual pursuit and courting of females is stressful for her. To avoid the male, the female has to stay in her burrow and not emerge to eat as often as she would like. There's no need to impose this on a female. Also, consider what can happen to the potential 20 hatchlings each year, for which good homes are rare.
- **Female restlessness.** By now, egg-laying season should be finished. If the female is still digging nest holes with her hind legs, being much more active than usual, maybe off her feed or obviously straining to pass eggs with no results, she may still have eggs that she cannot pass. Don't wait. Have her X-rayed by a vet that handles tortoises. See Tortoise Group Information Sheet # 24 on our website. Sometimes there is an unusually large egg that she cannot pass or a related problem. Continual straining should be remedied, and retained eggs can result in death.
- **Ants in the Yard.** From high up in the flowers of shrubs to dropped fruit and ant hills, your yard may be shimmering with ants. This morning my box turtle and one of my adults were eating dropped figs and ants were swarming over their faces. This did not slow down the eating. The tortoise's covering of scales and tough skin seems to provide adequate protection. The eyes seemed undisturbed. The box turtle was apparently unharmed. I have seen no ill effects when the ant-laden fruit is taken into the mouth and swallowed.  
  
However, if a hatchling comes to rest on an ant hill,

that is a different matter. The mass of irritated ants swarming over the tortoise can pierce the hatchling's skin, and ants can inject their venom and kill the baby. Early rescue and removal of ants with water and tweezers may save the tortoise.

I do not leave MegaDiet or fallen fruit in the baby pen. Hatchlings and small juveniles use the entire yard and I tour the yard as often as I can. I just have to hope that the figs that fall in the tangle of branches under the fig tree, where I cannot collect them, do not attract the small tortoises. I no longer try to rid my yard of ants with tortoise-proof bait traps. In the long run, it has not worked. Now, we all live together. The smallest juveniles are almost three and there have been no attacks.

### **Major Fundraising**

Is there someone out there with the expertise and desire to help us secure major funding? If you are a grant writer or have fundraising experience, please join our effort to reach the public. We need you.

From the reports and inquiries we receive, it seems that the need is growing to reach tortoise owners who are unaware of what constitutes responsible care. There are still too many tortoise owners with inadequate information and,

therefore, too many tortoises being abused and neglected. Please contact Betty at 739-8043. Thank you.

### **Life Memberships**

Have you been thinking of becoming a Life Member but you just haven't done it yet? The year 2006 will be the last year that you can purchase a Life membership for \$200. Beginning in 2007, the amount will increase to \$500.

### **Help for Owners of Exotic Tortoise**

If you own Sulcata giants, "Russian," Leopards, "Greeks," native and exotic water turtles, or box turtles, we can direct you to several experts on their care. Our speakers in July presented a fine program on exotics and their care. Sorry, if you missed it. Tortoise Group now has care sheets available on these tortoises and turtles.

### **Please Share Your Email Address with Us**

Please let us know when you change your email address. Otherwise, by the time we are able to contact you, you may have missed a timely message.

Our newsletter is sent out in March, May and August, but our programs and field trips may take place each month from March through September. The dates in the newsletters may have slipped your mind. We will remind you via email.

How many of you saved your tortoise after we sent an email reminder to check your burrows during and after rain to prevent drowning or suffocation under collapsed soil?

Sometimes we would like to share an environmental message with you. Call Betty with your new or changed email address.



*"Do I get one?" features "Jerry," a sulcata, by Danny and Maria Robinson of San Jose, California*

## Late Summer Meeting Schedule

**Time:** 1:00 – 3:00 pm

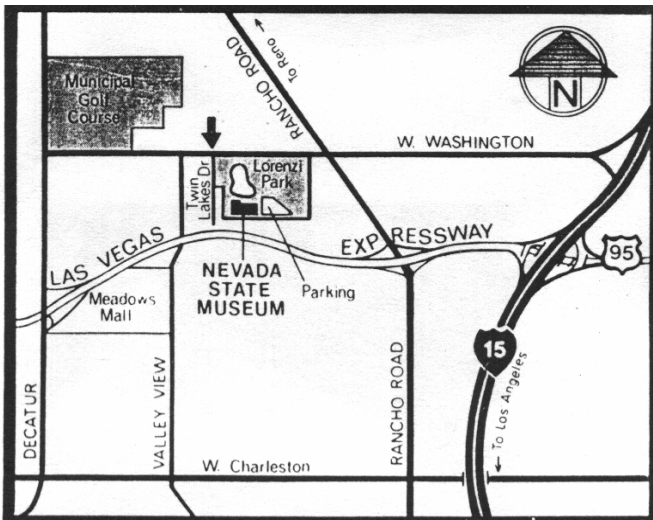
**Place:** Nevada State Museum and Historical Society (in Lorenzi Park – see map below)

### August 20

***How a Tortoise Works, Part II, An Interactive Workshop and Slide Presentation by Betty Burge***  
Biologist Betty Burge will give a slide presentation on desert tortoise reproduction, hatchlings, and hibernation (brumation). Hopefully, some of those persons who call with questions about these subjects will hear about this talk and come. Invite a friend who has tortoises. For those who have heard Betty discuss these subjects before, she plans to include some new information of interest. Those who have learned about these topics over the years will have the opportunity to answer questions from others in the group. It should be fun and interesting. Refreshments will be served.

### September 17

***2<sup>nd</sup> Annual Photo Contest and Ice Cream Social***  
Gather up those cute tortoise photos, mount them, add catchy captions if you wish, and bring them to the fabulous photo contest. Last year's entries were very clever, and we all had a wonderful time devouring our sundaes while enjoying the contest. This year is sure to bring many more participants and original ideas. Be sure to look for last year's entries throughout this issue of the newsletter. Turn to the next page for contest details.



## MegaDiet

### Satellite Sellers

Please call sellers for appointment

Charleston & Rancho	Carolyn – 878-4297
Nellis & Owens	Georgi – 459-1274
Ann Rd. & Decatur	<b>Seeking volunteer</b>
Summerlin	Kathy – 804-0472
Craig & Decatur	Beth – 400-4433 (evenings and weekends)
Rainbow & Alta	Sherri – 255-1357
Tropicana & Maryland	Betty – 739-8043
Industrial & Blue Diamond	Carolyn – 876-0668, ext. 874
Henderson, 89015	Laurie – 558-6985 (after 1:00 pm)
Henderson, 89015	<b>Seeking second volunteer</b>
Pahrump	Sheri – 775-727-5557
Out-of-town orders	Betty – 739-8043

A 1½ lb bag costing \$8.00 lasts a large tortoise about one month. MegaDiet is also sold at Tortoise Group meetings.

**10% discount to TG members  
who show their cards**

## New Satellite Sellers

In the area of:

Nellis and Owens	Georgi – 459-1274
Craig and Decatur	Beth – 400-4433 (evenings and weekends)
Rainbow and Alta	Sherri – 255-1357

Carolyn will be selling from her home near Rancho and Charleston 878-4297 and from her office on Industrial near Blue Diamond Rd. 876-0668, ext 874.

Please note that more volunteers are needed.  
Second MegaDiet sellers in areas are also welcome.



# **All-You-Can-Eat Ice Cream Social**

Date: Saturday, Sept 17

Time: 1:00 pm

Place: Nevada State  
Museum  
and Historical  
Society  
in Lorenzi Park

## **Desert Tortoises on Parade**

### **A photo contest & Ice Cream Social**

Our desert tortoises have been awake all summer displaying their mischievous and loving personalities with us humans who share their world.

Now is the time to catch the antics of your desert tortoise in photographs and enter your pet in "Desert Tortoises on Parade."

Celebrity Judges will present:

### **Best-In-Shell Prizes**

\$50 - Overall winner

\$25 - Each category

**Ribbons** for Funniest, Most Outlandish, Most Mischievous, and More

Tortoise photos will be judged in four categories; captions are optional (but they're a lot of fun)

1. Tortoise(s) Alone
2. Tortoise(s) with Other Animal(s)
3. Tortoise(s) with People
4. Tortoise(s) Gone Crazy: **In this category only**, photos may be any size, electronically or physically embellished---anything goes !!!

### **Rules**

- Maximum one entry per person/category
- All entries must be submitted by 1:15 pm on September 17 or received by Tortoise Group in the mail by September 16
- Photographs only; do not bring your tortoise to the contest
- **All photographs become the property of Tortoise Group**
- Winners need not be present

### **Photographs**

- Maximum size 8" x 10", black & white or color, glossy or matte
- Mounted on cardboard or in frame with margins no wider than one (1) inch.
- Caption (optional) may be written on bottom margin
- Information written on back: Category; Tortoise's Name, Shell Size, Sex; Photographer's Name, Address, and Phone Number; Owner's Name (if different from Photographer's)

**Winning Photos will be placed on the Website**

**Banana Splits  
Whipped Cream  
& Tortoises !!**

## Tale of a Missing Tortoise

By Anne McDonald

As tortoise owners know, it's not uncommon for our pets to "disappear" for days at a time. But when I noticed a recent absence of fresh scat, my suspicions were aroused. Out came the flashlight and down on my knees I went to check the burrow. No sign of our beloved 6-year-old tortie, Andy. A second and third sweep of the property confirmed my fears and panic set in. Though we had been aware of the importance of shell marking, we just hadn't gotten around to doing it. You can imagine how thoughts of that negligence haunted me as my son and I began a door-to-door search of our housing development.

While making the rounds, we bumped into a friend who recalled hearing a neighbor's dog barking fiercely one day during the previous week. He thought it odd because the animal was typically

quite docile. We went to the home in question and discovered that Andy had indeed started the commotion by attempting to enter the back yard. Thankfully, the owners had done the right thing – they called the Tortoise Pickup Service. Within hours Andy had been picked up and carted away to the Desert Tortoise Conservation Center (DTCC).

I called DTCC, gave my address, and described Andy. They verified the info and directed us to an office for "pickup." Kudos to them! Andy now sports a microchip ID implant, thanks to the county. And yes, our phone number is now (finally) displayed on the shell. By taking these steps and rededicating our efforts to inform visitors of our home's tortoise-specific security procedures, we trust that Andy's trips to the DTCC are behind us.

### Tortoise Group Membership Form

All or part of memberships and contributions should be tax deductible

Name	Phone	Individual	15.00	_____
_____	_____	Family	25.00	_____
Address	_____	Sustaining	35.00	_____
_____	_____	Sponsor	50.00	_____
City	State	Corporate	75.00	_____
_____	_____	Life	200.00	_____

Check one newsletter option      E-mail \_\_\_\_\_

- ☐ Send my newsletter by email
- ☐ Send my newsletter in hard copy,  
and send meeting notices and other news by e-mail
- ☐ Send my newsletter in hard copy

**2005 Special Contribution** \_\_\_\_\_

- ☐ Renewing member      ☐ New member

**Total Amount Enclosed** \_\_\_\_\_

Except for Life members, memberships expire each December 31

Skills, Interests \_\_\_\_\_

**Make check payable to Tortoise Group. Mail with form to:**  
**Tortoise Group 1201 S. Casino Center Las Vegas, NV 89104**

## **Question Corner**

**Q.** I have two male tortoises. They grew up together. Now for some reason they fight almost every day. Separating them to the farthest ends of the yard does not help.

**A.** You can expect males living in the close confines of your yard to fight. It is natural, it will not stop, and it is very stressful. The males need to be separated permanently, ASAP. We know it is hard to part with any of your tortoises, but that is the only solution unless you have a yard large enough to create separate habitats with walls between them that the tortoises cannot see through or climb over. The Desert Tortoise Conservation Center (DTCC) will take any tortoises that need to be removed to create peace. The DTCC staff cares for tortoises until they can be adopted by a responsible family or released under the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service-authorized program. Call 593-9027.

**Q.** I hear that spinach is not good for my tortoise. I thought it was full of nutrients.

**A.** Yes, spinach has valuable nutrients but it has something that is not good for tortoises, and that outweighs the advantages. Oxalic acid concentrates in the leaves and interferes with the ability of the tortoise's body to build bone – a very important need if you're a tortoise. **MegaDiet** eliminates the need for vegetables.

**Q.** I see by the recipe for the salad in your pamphlet on Adoption and Care that adding calcium is important. Where can I buy calcium?

**A.** No need to add calcium. You have an older version of the pamphlet. We no longer recommend the salad. It is not necessary because we have a nutrient-complete tortoise chow, **MegaDiet**, available through Tortoise Group. You can pick up a free copy of our recent care pamphlet at a local vet or library or visit our website [www.tortoisegroup.org](http://www.tortoisegroup.org). See next Question.

**Q.** I am using **MegaDiet**, but what is wrong with giving my tortoise extra vitamins and minerals?

**A.** **MegaDiet** is complete nutritionally and is sufficient in fiber. You can create severe problems with excess vitamins and minerals and certain

vegetables. Without going into detail, we suggest that **MegaDiet**, growing grass, dandelions, flowers that the tortoise can reach and others that you can harvest make an adequate diet. Tortoises are natural flower eaters. See our plant list, Information Sheet #21, on our website [www.tortoisegroup.org](http://www.tortoisegroup.org).

**Q.** I have a Spurred tortoise, *Geochelone sulcata*. Can I feed her **MegaDiet**?

**A.** Yes. **MegaDiet** is appropriate for all herbivorous reptiles, those that eat vegetation. We can pass along an information sheet about *sulcata* care.

**Q.** I had workers in my yard redoing my irrigation system. The tortoise escaped. What can I do to try to get him back?

**A.** You can call the Desert Tortoise Pick-up Service, 593-9027, to see if someone found him and called the Service to come for him. You can ask at the homes in your neighborhood. You can post signs along the street. If you have affixed your telephone number, as we recommend, you have a better chance of having him returned to you. If not, he may be gone forever. If he is returned, then would be the time to affix your phone number using the instructions on our Information Sheet # 5. It is available on our website or call our chairman Betty at 739-8043. She will affix an ID for you if you bring the tortoise to her. If any kind of work is being done in your back yard, you may have to be there with a watchful eye. You cannot be certain that workers will remember to close the gate or replace the gate barrier. Taking your tortoise in the house when the workers are there may be the only way to ensure that the tortoise does not leave. You can expect a tortoise to leave through an open gate.

**Q.** I have to give up my tortoise. A friend would like to have it. He has the pamphlet but I do not have the time to discuss with him how to prepare the yard. Can you help?

**A.** One of our Adoption Committee members will be happy to help by visiting your friend's yard and discussing what needs to be done. Call 739-8043.

### Question Corner (continued)

Q. What happens to tortoises where houses are built and other construction takes place?

A. If the land is public land, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service will stipulate that the developer must remove tortoises, even fence the construction site. Collected tortoises are turned over to the DTCC for care. On private land, the developers are no longer obliged to remove tortoises before the land is disturbed. However, they are not to intentionally hurt or kill a tortoise. It can be moved out of harm's way or turned over to the DTCC Holding Facility pick-up service free of charge. Unfortunately, tortoises are faithful to where they live and return to places from which they have been removed. A very small percent of developers remove tortoises prior to land disturbance.

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### Not Just the Tortoise

The Clark County Multiple Species Habitat Conservation Program (MSHCP) or Desert Conservation Program, for short, does as the title suggests. It involves more than the Mojave Desert Tortoise. If you want to see the other 77 species of concern, the Species Account Manual (SAM) is now available on the Mojave Max website. There is a color photo and a short description of each species. Here is the pathway:

[www.mojavemax.com](http://www.mojavemax.com). Click on *Mojave Max*, then click on *Species Account Manual*. To understand the three categories in which the species are grouped, click the Glossary.

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