

# Tortoise Group Newsletter

**MARCH MEETING**

**Root Beer Floats!**

**Free Tortoise Flowers!**

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

Volume XX No. 1 March 2007

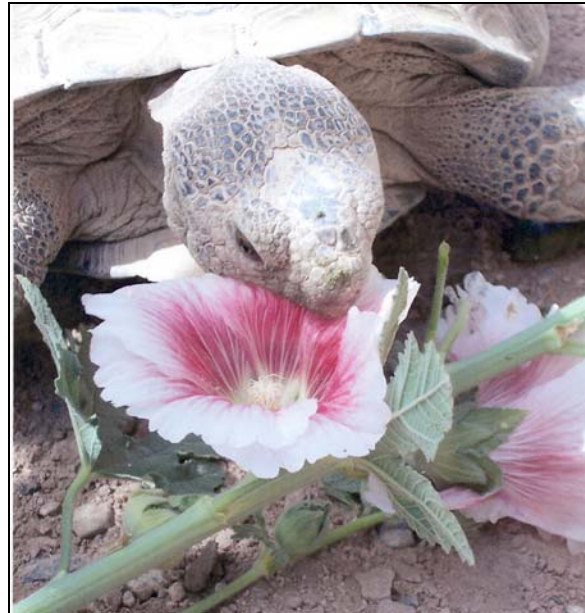
[www.TortoiseGroup.org](http://www.TortoiseGroup.org)

Las Vegas, Nevada

## The Pool or the Tortoise?

By Deb and Rich Ruocco

It was a tough decision, but we knew that we could not keep Molly and have a swimming pool, too. We adopted Molly from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service through Tortoise Group soon after building our home. But on the day we started digging the pool, we had to bid Molly a very sad good-bye. She lived in a natural burrow behind our house for several years. She flourished with us, putting on several pounds during her stay. We hope she will be adopted by another family since she is an excellent pet. We still work closely with the Tortoise Group but will likely never see Molly again.



"Yumm...These hollyhocks are dee-licious!"  
with Snidley Whiplash by Debbie Forbush



Aria says good-bye to Molly

## Advice from Dr. K.

Several of my tortoises have decided to take a quick peek out of their burrows to see if springtime is here and then decided to head back down again, so their grand entrance is soon to arrive! Let's all get out there this weekend and inspect our tortoise habitats to be certain they are safe and secure!

## Cactus Cate is Awake! - February 16

"Clark County's Desert Tortoise emerged from her winter nap at 3:20 pm. Clark County employees noticed that new resident Cactus Cate was roaming around her tortoise habitat and eating plants. The ground temperature in her burrow was 63 degrees Fahrenheit, and the ground temperature outside of her burrow, in the sun, was 84 degrees Fahrenheit at the time of her emergence." (CC News Release)

## Email: Please Help Us Keep Up With You

Field Trip Reminders, Newsletter Postings, Environmental Updates: we know you want to keep up to date with all the happenings of Tortoise Group. But, we can't keep in touch without your new email address. Please take a moment to help us with the huge task of keeping up the email list. Click here to give us an update:

[TortoiseGroup@att.net](mailto:TortoiseGroup@att.net).

Make your tortoise a celebrity! Email photos and stories to [kutiger@earthlink.net](mailto:kutiger@earthlink.net)

## MegaDiet Corner

Tortoises warm up slowly in spring. They come out more and more often, bask, and begin to move about. When they start to browse on the grass and plants, it's time to offer MegaDiet.

### Creative Tips on Introducing MegaDiet

- Soften MegaDiet to cookie dough consistency. Try unsweetened apple sauce or liquefied lettuce instead of water
- Soften and roll up in a grape leaf, rose petal or other favorite leaf (not lettuce)
- Hollow out half a cherry tomato and fill with softened MegaDiet
- Soften and stud the surface thickly with rose petals or desert willow flowers.
- Go cold turkey. No muss, no fuss.
- Email tips to Kathy at [kutiger@earthlink.net](mailto:kutiger@earthlink.net)



**"When did these petunias get so tall?" with Franklin by Zan Korba. Winner of the Tortoise Alone category in the September 2006 Photo Contest**

### Let's Here it for MegaDiet!

Testimonial of the year: "You know, last year my tortoise was not interested in MegaDiet no matter what I tried, and I tried every suggestion you gave me. This year, all of a sudden he is eating softened MegaDiet like, "Where has it been?" I am so relieved. I know how good it is for him and I am glad I was patient.

## MegaDiet Satellite Sellers

Please call sellers for appointment

Nellis & Owens	Georgi – 459-1274
Camino al Norte & W. Ann Rd	Greg & Char – 649-1630
I-215 & Lone Mtn	Lynn – 655-5698
Summerlin, I-215 & Far Hills	Kathy & Pauline – 804-0472, 9am – 7pm
Rainbow & Alta	<b>Seeking volunteer</b>
Charleston & Rancho	<b>Seeking volunteer</b>
Tropicana & Maryland	Betty – 739-8043
Dean Martin & Blue Diamond	Carolyn – 876-0668, ext. 874
Green Valley, Eastern & Windmill	Ed & Pat – 269-7108
Henderson, Lake Mead & Warm Springs	Laurie – 558-6985 (after 11:00 am)
Henderson, Boulder Hwy & Equestrian	Gail – 564-0031
Boulder City, Utah & Adams	Patty – 293-7263
Pahrump	Sheri – 775-727-5557
Kingman, AZ	Toni – 928-757-8317
Mail orders	Betty – 702-739-8043

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

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

**Membership Renewal time!!**

### **Burrow Collapse, Causes & Cures**

When the soil roof of the burrow becomes full of water and heavy, it may fall of its own weight. That soil may close off the burrow or fall on the tortoise, especially if the tortoise has dug beyond the wood or other hard material of the roof.

If this happens in winter, by the time the tortoise is ready to emerge from winter sleep the soil may have hardened trapping the tortoise. During the winter rain, water may have drained into the burrow making a puddle that may be over the tortoise's head. The tortoise may not wake up and may drown before the water drains away. It is important that you check the burrow interior when these rains occur, night or day. Flooding or collapse that you can see calls for immediate excavation of the burrow and removal of the tortoise. A wet burrow is not good for a tortoise. Leave the burrow open to dry. We offer instructions about how to provide for a tortoise in winter when the burrow is soaked or may not be built yet. See our website or call 702-739-8043 for Information Sheet #15.

In summer the tortoise will probably emerge from the burrow when it rains unless a collapse prevents this. If you see the collapse, open the burrow and rescue the tortoise. While the wet burrow is drying, the tortoise needs a place to get out of the heat. Above-ground shade is usually not enough to prevent overheating or possible death. If another burrow is not available, dig one that is at least 3-4 tortoise body lengths long so the tortoise is protected. When the floor of the long burrow is dry to several inches in depth, then you may cover it.

### **Emergency? Call for The Snooper**

Tortoise Group has purchased a burrow probe video camera with an infrared light that allows us to see inside your burrow. Those wonderful rainy days in winter that are so vital for desert annuals to germinate, and those torrential storms during the summer monsoon season, may threaten tortoise burrows in the wild and your yard.

**Where does The Snooper come in?** If rainfall has been substantial and your tortoise has lengthened the burrow, turned a corner, and is now out of sight, we can come with The Snooper. Our number is 702 739-8043. Do consider that if drowning or smothering may be imminent you may not want to wait for us before digging up the tortoise.

Our service area extends beyond the Las Vegas Valley to include Boulder City, Goodsprings, and Sandy Valley. Within the Las Vegas metropolitan area, the charge for our visit with The Snooper is \$25.00. Beyond the valley, add 50 cents per mile. You can do your dance for much needed rain, but have your shovel ready.



**Betty using probe and viewing scene on screen**



**The Snooper, top view with probe to the right**

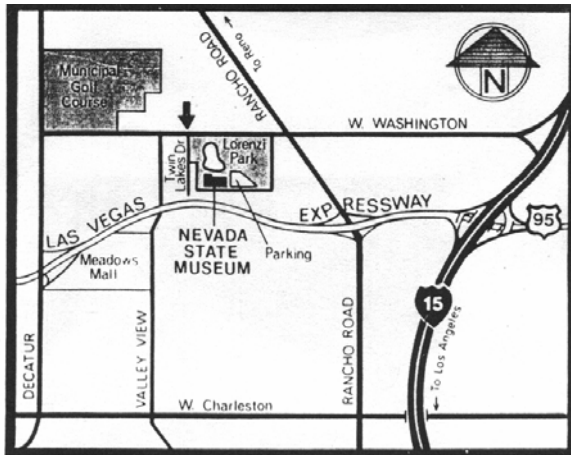
## Spring Meeting Schedule

### March 17 - Spring Habitat and Tortoise Tune-Up

**When:** Saturday, 1:00 – 3:00 pm

**Where:** Nevada State Museum and Historical Society, 700 Twin Lakes Drive (in Lorenzi Park at Valley View and 95)

Giving your tortoise a physical, sprucing up your yard, Snooper Demo, Free Tortoise Plants, Root Beer Floats, and more. Learn how to see into the burrow using two mirrors! Come have fun but please leave your tortoise at home.



**What will we do?** We will park along the road and walk in the desert looking for tortoises and exploring their environment. We will look for burrows and other sign, and share our discoveries. The spring flowers—tortoise food—should be very plentiful and increase our chances of seeing tortoises. There is something very exciting about finding a wild tortoise. Come share that feeling.

**What should you bring?** Prepare yourself for the sun. Wear a hat and sturdy walking shoes. Slather on the sunscreen and bring plenty of water. Camera, binoculars, and notebook. A walking stick is useful even if you are very fit. If it should be raining and it looks like it won't be clearing, we will not go. Walking on very wet or muddy desert is destructive to habitat.

**Directions:** Drive south on I-15 toward Los Angeles. The drive from Tropicana Avenue to Jean takes approximately 30 minutes. Exit right at the Jean exit, then turn left at the stop sign and go under the freeway. Proceed 1 block to the gas station on the left, which is across the street from the Nevada Landing Casino.

### April 15 - Field Trip to Translocation Site to See Tortoises in the Wild

**When:** Sunday morning, 9:30 am – noon

**Where to meet:** See Directions below

**Note:** This outing is not appropriate for young children

**What makes this area special?** For several years the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has authorized the release of tortoises held at the Desert Tortoise Conservation Center. Several thousand tortoises have been released in this 32 square mile area of public land. Wild resident tortoises are there, too. The tortoises chosen for release from the Center have been successful in adjusting or readjusting to life in the wild.

Please be prompt. We will leave some of the cars at the gas station and carpool to the site to reduce the impact of vehicles. The road to the site is adequate for the average sedan.

### May 12 - Edible Plants For Tortoises

**When:** Saturday, 9 am – 11:00

**Where:** Garden Center at the entrance to the Community College of Southern Nevada, 6375 W. Charleston Avenue, 1/4 mile west of Jones

**New and hard-to-get edible plants for tortoises.** A special talk for Tortoise Group on natives and non-natives for tortoises, plus a guided walk through the Garden Center and an opportunity to buy many plants.

## Dr. K's Kolumn

By Christine Kolmstetter, DVM  
Cheyenne West Animal Hospital

Hi again! Hopefully everyone's winter brumation went well. We'll have a series of veterinary-related tortoise topics again in this year's newsletter, starting with the issues of Rover and the backyard tortoise(s). Why? Because, although we all love our canine companions, they can sometimes unintentionally become harmful or even deadly for our tortoise friends.

As a veterinarian who treats reptiles, I often hear owners of dogs and tortoises say, "My dog is very gentle and would never harm my desert tortoise. They are together in the yard, and Rover often follows my tortoise around and sometimes nudges him gently with his nose. They're friends, and he's just playing with the tortoise. The tortoise doesn't seem to mind." I explain that even if Rover has never actually harmed the tortoise, Rover's nudging and prodding are likely stressful to the reptile. It is also important to remember that if Rover ingests any reptile feces, he could potentially develop severe gastrointestinal problems such as vomiting and diarrhea.

Unfortunately, I often treat severely injured tortoises brought by very distraught and shocked owners who state, "Rover is always gentle, and I don't understand why he suddenly bit my tortoise. I came home from work and found the tortoise upside down next to the doghouse with blood all over the shell." My own golden retriever is the best, gentlest, cutest dog on the planet. But let's face it, she's a retriever. Her instinct is to retrieve her toy, her ball or anything that vaguely looks like a ball. Apparently, to many dogs, a moving tortoise looks like a slowly moving, easy-to-fetch toy or something to gnaw on.



**Lethal dog bites penetrated the carapace**

The teeth of even a small breed of dog can penetrate the shell of a tortoise and potentially cause irreparable harm. Tortoise lungs are along the upper part of the shell, and when dog teeth penetrate that shell into the lungs, very severe life-threatening lung infections can develop. In some instances, shell damage may appear minor; however, this can be deceiving. The strength of the dog's jaws can sometimes cause enough force to result in deadly internal crush injuries to the tortoise.

Dog bites often result in severe, deadly trauma to the tortoise's legs or head. Yes, tortoises can pull their head, legs and tail completely into the shell. However, a dog can chew a tortoise shell to reach the legs and head. These extremely painful, slowly healing wounds can require lengthy hospitalization and repeated follow-up visits to the vet. Deep, penetrating shell wounds cannot simply be sealed shut. Possible underlying infections need to be addressed, and anesthesia and surgical repair may be necessary. Acrylic shell closure is sometimes needed once wound infections are treated. Sadly, some of these tortoises may need to be euthanized.

Take quick action if Rover has injured a tortoise. Stop any bleeding with a small bandage, although it's difficult if the tortoise retracts its limbs into the shell. Gently wash any soil from the wounds with lukewarm water, not peroxide, being careful not to flush water into any deep bite holes. If the holes penetrate the shell, soil and other debris could be washed into the body cavity and result in more extensive infection. Cover any open wounds with a moist towel to prevent the exposed tissue from becoming too dry. Place the tortoise in a box or other secure container, keep the area dark, and take him to a reptile veterinarian as soon as possible. Remember, the best course of action in preventing these injuries is to keep Rover and tortoise separated!!



**Shell is crushed and tissue exposed**

## Emergence Has Started

By Betty Burge

Is early February early enough for you? Some of you will have to wait until April but the big shuffle has started. Tortoises are doing everything from poking their noses out of burrows to walking across the yard and settling into a new place. These new places are worrisome to some of you because some tortoises are very exposed. This can be the corner of the property wall, the patio, under the gas meter, under fallen cactus pads or, in their typical way, they have disappeared completely but not in the burrow where they spent the winter. **NOT TO WORRY.** In my yard, those that have moved have settled down in these new exposed places.

What is this annual shuffle all about? I have watched wild and pet tortoises move out of their winter burrows when above-ground temperatures are still not warm enough to support activity, stimulate appetite, or digestion. These tortoises park under a shrub or other superficial cover and may not leave that place for several weeks. In fact, the earlier this move takes place the longer the tortoise remains in this new place. I hypothesize that this animal, that is a master at behaving in the way needed to regulate its body temperature or what we call “behavioral thermoregulation,” is doing what it needs to do at this time of year to get revved up for the season.

It all started with a signal from the tortoise’s “internal clock” that caused the tortoise to emerge from brumation (winter sleep) and do what I have just described. You know that even a February day can be warm in the sunshine, and we usually have what we call a “false spring” in early February. It may not last but I just bet it gets some of you to the plant nursery.

By February even the best insulated burrow has become very cold and the sun has not penetrated its depth. Some of our tortoises start warming up to activity temperature by absorbing heat from the sun as they continue to sleep outside the burrow. You learned early that reptiles are at the mercy of the

heat and cold in their environment. To prevent becoming too hot or too cold to function properly and in the desert to stay alive, the tortoise that is successful adjusts with its behavior, such as burrowing or basking. If an early riser were to return to the burrow each evening, it would lose much of the heat it gained during the day to the cold burrow air and soil. Yes, each night the exposed tortoise loses some of the heat gathered during the day but possibly not as much as it would if it returned to the burrow.



“Anybody Home” with Bruce by June Dolan

## Spreading the Word is Free

If you have a friend or acquaintance who does not receive our newsletter, you might ask them if they are interested. Newsletters are free. Tell them about our new edition of the Care Pamphlet, too, to be published in March 2007. They’re available at all veterinarians and libraries in the Las Vegas area.

### Websites of Interest

Desert Tortoise Council [www.deserttortoise.org](http://www.deserttortoise.org)  
 California Turtle and Tortoise Club [www.tortoise.org](http://www.tortoise.org)  
 Tortoise Trust (United Kingdom and the USA)  
[www.tortoisetrust.org](http://www.tortoisetrust.org)  
 American Tortoise Rescue (S. California)  
[www.tortoise.com](http://www.tortoise.com)  
 Desert Tortoise Preserve Committee (California)  
[www.tortoise-tracks.org](http://www.tortoise-tracks.org)  
 Clark County School District Education Website  
[www.ccsd.net](http://www.ccsd.net)  
 Mojave Max Education [www.mojavemax.com](http://www.mojavemax.com)

**From the Cactus Cate's Caretakers**

By Debbie Forbush

Jerry Shupe and I are Cactus Cate's official Tortoise Group volunteer caretakers along with Christina Gibson from the Clark County Desert Conservation Program. I visit her on weekdays and Jerry covers the weekends. We document each visit with information such as Cate's behavior during our visit or any problems we notice within the habitat. Internal and external thermometers allow us to monitor the burrow temperatures to assure that Cate is comfortable and safe.

The plants we planted last year seem to be thriving and apparently survived the cold spell unscathed. The globe mallow and indigo bush appear to have grown the most, and I was quite surprised at how healthy they looked. The galleta grasses were quickly eaten to the ground last year by resident antelope ground squirrels, and it doesn't appear they will grow back.

Cate attracts quite an audience of county workers when she eats, and I talk to many people. Here I have the opportunity to answer questions on tortoise care, and I always have a Tortoise Care pamphlet available for those who are interested in adopting a tortoise or for people who already have a tortoise.



**Jerry Shupe shows Cactus Cate to admirers**

----- Cut Here -----

**Tortoise Group Membership Form**

A portion of memberships and contributions may be tax deductible

Please Print

Name (one name only please)	Phone	15.00 _____
_____	_____	25.00 _____
Address		35.00 _____
_____		50.00 _____
City	State	Zip Code
_____	_____	_____
		<b>Life</b> 500.00 _____

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

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

Renewing member       New member

**2007 Special Contribution** \_\_\_\_\_

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

Memberships are individual. They expire each December 31, except for Life members.

10% discount on MegaDiet and other Tortoise Group goodies to members and their immediate families.

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

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

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

**Calendar for 2007**

**March 17 - Spring Habitat and Tortoise Tune-Up**

Sprucing up your yard, which weeds to keep, demo of looking in your burrow with The Snooper and using two mirrors, giving a tortoise physical, root beer floats, free tortoise plants and more!

**April 15 - Field Trip to Tortoise Release Site near Jean, Nevada**

Look for tortoises in the wild, view spring foliage

**May 12 - New and Hard-to-Get Edible Plants For Tortoises**

Special talk for Tortoise Group on natives and non-natives for tortoises; a guided walk through the Garden Center and an opportunity to buy plants. At CCSN

**Please refer to page 4 for program details**

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