

# Tortoise Group Newsletter

Tortoise Group

A non-profit, 501 (c)(3) organization since 1982

Volume XXVI No. 3 July 2013

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

Las Vegas, Nevada

## Register Your Precious Tortoise(s) on the Tortoise Group Website Today!

AS SOON AS YOU READ THIS MESSAGE, please go to the Tortoise Group website and register your beautiful tortoise. You can print out a personalized Adoption Certificate, too. Really. Don't wait!

- [Register your tortoise!](#)

On May 1, a new Nevada regulation limited **new custodians** to one tortoise. Current custodians have an opportunity to make their tortoises legal—grandfather them in, so to speak. The only tortoises that were 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.

## Campaign to Find Homes for Tortoises

*The Problem:* The Pet Desert Tortoise Pickup Service closed and the Desert Tortoise Conservation Center (DTCC) is scheduled to close in fall 2014. Currently, the only place to turn in a found or unwanted tortoise is The Animal Foundation at 655 N Mojave Road (then transfer to the DTCC). This outlet will close for tortoises when 300 have been turned in. That's the limit the DTCC can accept.

### Cause: Out-of-control backyard overbreeding

#### *The Solution:*

- We beg you to separate your breeding pair. Let us find homes for your mating males (see p. 3).
- *Tortoise Meeting and Adoption Fairs* this summer will find homes for hundreds of tortoises. The first *Adoption Fair* is Tuesday evening July 16, 6:30-8:00 pm at the Boulder City Library.

Help this big, exciting project succeed! The more people who volunteer, the more tortoises will find new homes. To learn more, contact Janina at [JTortAdopt@gmail.com](mailto:JTortAdopt@gmail.com) or 702-374-3967.



**Rocky munches on desert willow flowers.** Photo by DeeDee DeLorenzo

## MegaDiet RF a Big Hit with Tortoises!

Tortoises are telling us that they LOVE the new MegaDiet RF. Overwhelmingly, tortoises are taking right to MegaDiet RF and eating more than their custodians imagined. MegaDiet RF contains a lot of fiber, so it's a very healthy meal.

Check the Tortoise Group Home page for a [video on preparing MegaDiet RF](#). Other details on page 2.

## Volunteers Wanted to Help...

- Approve backyard habitats for adoption
- Make short videos for website
- Organize the storage unit
- Write pieces or lay out the newsletter
- Design new posters for fairs
- Lead the Membership Committee
- Coordinate the volunteers
- Keep our mailing lists up to date

**Is Your 2013 Membership Due?  
Check your address label, please!**

## Feeding Your Tortoise

### 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 2-3 times per week 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.

### What Else Can I Feed My Tortoise

- Dark, leafy vegetables: dandelion, collard, mustard greens
- Dandelion flowers, desert willow blossoms, roses (grown without pesticides), other ornamental flowers like petunias and gazenias, new spineless cactus pads, other garden and desert plants (more ideas on p. 5)



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

### Foods to Avoid Completely

- All kinds of lettuce (contain only water, sugar, and very little fiber)
- All fruit and corn (tortoises can't digest sugar)
- Spinach, beet greens, and Swiss chard (oxalic acid binds calcium making it unavailable to the tortoise's system)
- Dog or cat food (tortoises are vegetarians)
- Canned and frozen vegetables, dairy products, bread

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

### MegaDiet

#### Satellite Sellers

Please call sellers for appointment. 702-Area code

Check website for [Satellite Seller locations](#)

Nellis & Owens	Georgi – 459 -1274
Ann & Camino al Norte	Don – 374-2466
Durango & Grand Teton (new)	Cathy – 339-5012
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
	378-6514 cell
Serene & 9400 S Eastern	Helene
(Las Vegas Day Spa)	878-7877 w 375-7998 c
Russell & Pecos (new)	Sherri – 339-9821
Russell & Nellis (new)	Cindy – 530-9052
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 (has MDRF)	
<i>Aloha Animal Hospital</i>	567-5222
S Torrey Pines & Warm Springs	
<i>Lone Mountain Animal Hospital</i>	645-3116
Rainbow & US95	
<i>Moon Sun Landscapes</i>	645-2032
Russell & Boulder Hwy	

*MDRF not yet available at most businesses*

**33% discount to TG members**

## How to Keep the Tortoise Population in Check

### Separate the Boys and Girls

Start today! It only takes once, and we know now that females store sperm for several years. Please take responsibility, just like with dogs and cats.

Yes, those hatchlings are adorable. But, the thousands that will be born this year have no homes ready to accept them. So, most will be given away, housed in poor conditions, and die. Stop this problem at the source: separate your breeding pair.

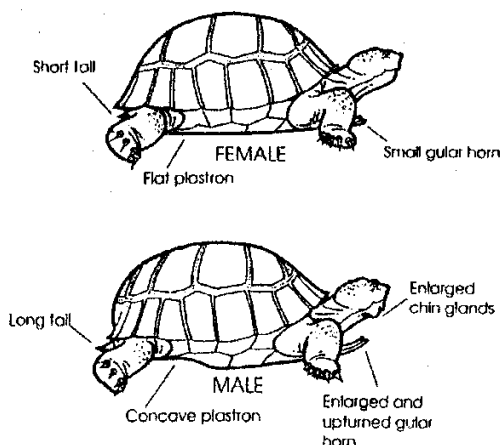
### Put Your Male on the List for Adoption!

This summer's Adoption Fairs will find many new families looking for beautiful boys to adopt. You can put your male on the list by emailing Kathy at [kathyutiger@tortoisegroup.org](mailto:kathyutiger@tortoisegroup.org). State the length of the shell please.

### Is Shelly a Boy or a Girl?

Until the shell length is 7-8 inches, you won't know your tortoise's sex. At that size, the 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.**

However, it is still often difficult to sex a tortoise. Here's one way: males will sometimes "display" (briefly show the penis). One distressed caller said that Daisy had a purple flower coming out of her butt. Daisy is a boy for sure!



**The tortoise penis is often mistaken for some kind of problem. Flaccid here, it can be other shapes and even purply.** Photo by Pauline Antonakos

### Eggbound by Dr. Christine Kolmstetter

How we deal with eggbound tortoises depends on several things: what is the overall health of the tortoise, is she still eating and active and bright and alert, or weak and dehydrated and in poor body condition? If she is in very poor overall condition and has been eggbound for a while, very likely she has developed a severe infection due to the retained eggs. If her body is shutting down, then sadly the most humane decision is euthanasia. If she is bright and alert and in good body condition, sometimes hospitalizing and giving fluids and medications for supportive care can result in the eggs being laid. If on x-rays the eggs appear to be too big to go through the pelvis or if they appear to be very old eggs with very hardened shells, then the only option is surgery to remove the eggs and spay the tortoise. This is a very major anesthetic and surgical procedure.

So there is no one simple answer; there are many factors to consider. Unfortunately by the time some folks realize that there is a problem, the tortoise is already very ill, dehydrated, in poor condition and close to death, in which case as I mentioned above, the kindest decision is euthanasia.



## Summer Behavior—It's Hot, Hot, Hot!

**Estivation.** Smart tortoises are coming out early and then retreating to the relative cool of the burrow. As the summer progresses though, it may become too hot to come out. Why? The temperature in the burrow will rise as the earth warms up, peaking in late July or early August. It may be more beneficial for the tortoise to stay in the burrow than to come out for a short period, get hot fast, and then use a lot of energy trying to cool off. Instead, the tortoise may stay in the burrow for a few days or even one or two weeks without coming out. This period is called estivation.

**Burrow Temperature.** Several people are measuring the outside temperature and the burrow temperature to see how well the burrow is insulating. Over July 4th, the outside temperature at 5 pm was 108°-112°, while my burrow temp was 86°-87°. I know that in late July-early August when the earth is its warmest, the burrow temp may rise to 100°.

## Tortoise Seeks the Optimal Temperature

Tortoises regulate their body temperatures by going in and out of sun and shade, including their burrows. In hot summer, my tortoise comes out of the burrow at about 10 pm to sleep outside in air that is cooler than in the burrow. In early morning, before sunrise, he retreats to the burrow.

## Why Is My Tortoise's Shell Scraped Off on Top?

When a tortoise has grown or a burrow has partially collapsed, a tortoise may be almost trapped and have to struggle to emerge each day. This can result in the shell being ground off as it pushes and pushes to exit and enter its burrow. Watch for this.

## Why Is There Wet Dirt on the Nose?

A damp nose is a sign of an Upper Respiratory Tract Disease (URTD) infection. If the dampness goes away, don't worry. If it becomes snotty or won't go away, it's time to take your tortoise to the vet for a full examination. Diagnostic tests may be recommended as well as a course of medication. Check our list of [vets in Las Vegas with experience treating tortoises](#).

Tortoises easily transmit URTD to each other, so if one has it they all will. And they will carry it for life. My Tad got it from his mother and had one or two outbreaks many years ago—none in the last 15 years.

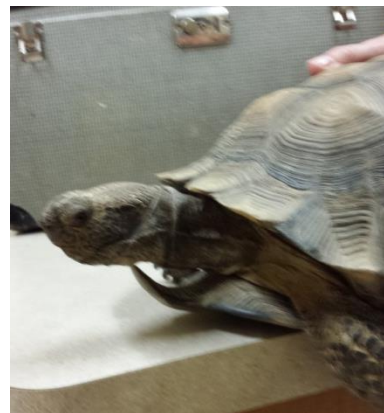
Note: If you think your tortoise might need to be treated before brumation, talk to your vet in August. You will want to have the medication while the tortoise is still active and good and warm.

## Should I Worry about That Whistling-Wheezing Sound?

Unless you see other signs of illness, a little nasal whistling is normal. Tortoises have tiny bones and narrow passageways that can cause whistling.

## Long Gular Horn Can Be a Problem

Tad's gular horn impeded his eating and was only going to grow more, so Dr. Kolmstetter suggested a trim. She anesthetized Tad, trimmed the horn with a Dremel wheel, and covered it with plumber's putty for temporary protection.



**Before: Tad's long curving horn is in the way when eating food low to the ground.**  
Photos by K Utiger

**After: Tad enjoying easy access to his food after having his gular horn trimmed.**



## Tortoise Care Thoughts & Ideas

### Cool Burrow Ideas - July 4<sup>th</sup> Temps

- Powell Patrick made Duke's aboveground burrow using R-19 insulation to stuff the blocks on the bottom layer and to cover the top. Over the last two years, the highest temperature was 99.22°, the coldest 41.26. Powell's PowerPoint presentation given at the June meeting will be on the website soon.
  - When thinking about the cooling effect of palm leaves on palapas and roofs, Mike LaFavor collected his neighbors' palm leaves and created a thick layer on the top of a burrow without much other insulation. The air circulation must have helped, because Myrtle's burrow only reached 98° when the temp on the palm leaves was 130° (outside temp 108°).
  - Several people have shared that they sprinkle (sprinkle lightly, not soak) the top of the burrow to create some evaporative cooling. (Also, the R-factor of wet earth is higher than dry.)
  - My own underground burrow that has many tons of earth around it stayed at a balmy 86° while the outside temp reached 112°.
- Keep sending in those great ideas that we can share!

### How Long Should I Soak My Tortoise?

Answer: Until your tortoise is ready to get out!  
It's a good idea to soak your tortoise every few weeks and always before and after brumation. Your tortoise may submerge its head and drink for 20 or 30 minutes (or longer). Don't worry. Your tortoise will let you know when it's finished.



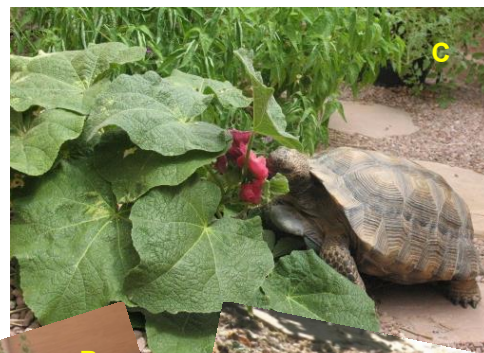
**"Mmm.  
Love this  
soaking!"**



**"I'm done.  
Get me out!"**

### Seasonal Plants for Browsing

Even in the very hot summer, our desert climate can provide a wide range of plants for tortoise browsing. Cantaloupe (and other) sprouts (A), all the primroses (B), hollyhocks (C), grape leaves, dandelions, desert willow blossoms (D), gazanias, rose petals, spurge, verbena, grasses, honeysuckles and many more!





## Mid-Summer Events

**Saturday, July 27, 1-3 pm**

**“Slow and Steady Wins the Race: The Challenges of Keeping Your Tortoise Healthy”**

**By Dr Jamie Sullivan, Veterinarian  
Aloha Animal Hospital**

Dr Sullivan’s special interests include exotic animal medicine, ultrasound and promoting preventative pet health care in the community.

Dr Sullivan will talk about:

- Common health problems in tortoises
- Importance of regular vet checkups
- Diet and housing

Dr Sullivan hopes to answer all your general tortoise questions. Please remember that she can’t diagnose without seeing your tortoise.

### **Share the Bounty!**

Bring your extra plants, cactus, dandelions, and any fun seeds. Last month Sue Lyo brought apples from her tree, the month before Tina Bates brought bunches of catnip, and Mandy Nicholson always brings heaps of cactus pads and plants. Surprise us!

### **Quick Tip: Hot Summer Behavior**

- Changes in behavior—what to expect
- Rain challenges & solutions
- Hatching, hatchlings, and hatchling prep

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

### **Mark TG Meetings on Your Calendar**

Saturday, August 24

Saturday, September 28

Jim Moore, The Nature Conservancy

**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

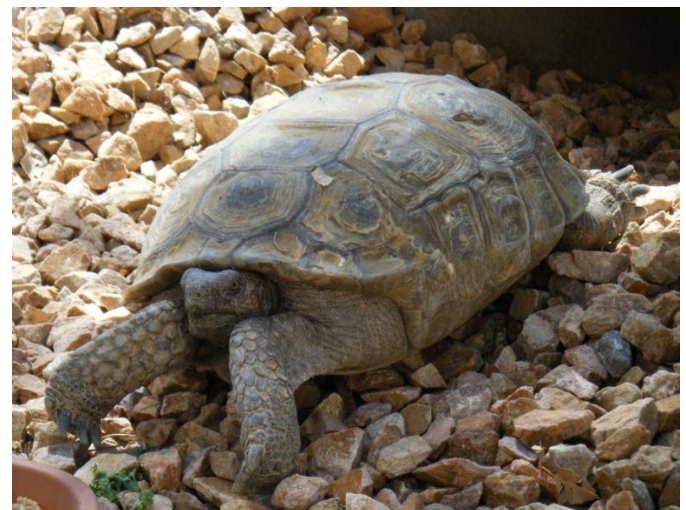
Las Vegas, NV 89101

Right across from Cashman Center



Watch you email for announcements of:

- Tortoise Tips
- Special Adoption Meetings in Las Vegas
- Volunteer opportunities



**Sidney stretches out in the sunshine—no stress here!** Photo by Charlene Pennington

**Be legal. Register your tortoise at**  
**<http://www.tortoisegroup.org/adoption.php>**

## The Tortoise and the Bobcat!

By Glenn Michaels

Around our home near Sabino Canyon in Tucson, Bob the bobcat is a regular visitor to Big Boy's yard where he sometimes takes a nap in the heat of the day. Did Bob's increasing visits to Big Boy's yard pose a potential threat to the tortoise? Local experts saw no threat and had not heard of any bobcat attacks or injuries to tortoises.

At 4 pm one day, we watched Big Boy and Bob relax on the lawn for about an hour. Big Boy grazed while Bob stretched out, watched, and took cat naps. When Big Boy finished grazing he got within a foot of Bob, stretched out all his limbs and neck for a good sunning, and then they just looked at each other for 20 minutes. Big Boy finally got up and walked to his burrow. Only then did Bob get up, stretch, and jump the wall to go on with his day.



**Big Boy (tortoise) and Bob (bobcat) regularly stretch out in the yard together in Tucson, AZ.** Photo by Glenn Michaels

----- 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: \_\_\_\_\_

33% 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**

**Tortoise Group**  
**PO Box 33866**  
**Las Vegas, NV 89133**  
**702-739-7113**

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

## Taking Tortoise Group to the Next Level

We're on our way! With the considerable help of Life Member Jim Gans, the Board has begun the process of moving the organization from essentially a large club to that of a well-run business with a paid Executive Director. We have almost completed selecting a consultant to work with an Advisory Committee over the next few months to achieve this challenging and exciting goal. The consultant will guide us in putting together the Committee.



If you are willing to join the Committee to lend your expertise and experience to this important tortoise project, please email [KathyUtiger@TortoiseGroup.org](mailto:KathyUtiger@TortoiseGroup.org). Tell me what about your background and what skills you bring to the table. We'll want to select the very best team possible. Don't be shy! Thank you.

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