

Tortoise Group Newsletter

Tortoise Group

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

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www.TortoiseGroup.org

Las Vegas, Nevada

What's Really Happening at the Desert Tortoise Conservation Center?

By Kathy Utiger, Tortoise Group Chairperson

You have doubtless read the horror stories and petitions about hundreds of wonderful healthy tortoises destined to be euthanized when the Desert Tortoise Conservation Center (DTCC) closes in fall of 2014 due to lack of funding. Some alarmist stories even stated that all 1400 tortoises now in residence would be euthanized. The public is outraged. **These stories are not true!**

Please turn to page 5 to read a thorough description of the program at the DTCC and plans for the future by Jeannie Stafford, Public Relations Officer of the US Fish and Wildlife Service.

How Has the Public Responded?

Tortoise Group has received well over one hundred calls and emails from the entire country offering to adopt one or many tortoises. Of course, Nevada tortoises must stay in Nevada. Other big-hearted people, especially out of state, would like to set up sanctuaries. Please know that all ideas are being considered and pursued by the various agencies. The public has been extremely generous.

How Is Tortoise Group Involved?

Some healthy tortoises are not candidates for translocation. These tortoises may be missing part of a limb, are too large, or have been sterilized. These tortoises need to find homes before next fall. Therefore, Tortoise Group has intensified its outreach to the Las Vegas community to find adoptive homes for these special tortoises.

Links to some of the news stories and to photos of the DTCC can be found on the [Tortoise Group Home page](http://www.tortoisegroup.org).



This handsome tortoise at the DTCC needs to find an adoptive home in southern Nevada soon.

Photo by Lori Scott

DTCC Problem Caused by Overbreeding

The DTCC was created to house wild tortoises removed from land to be developed. It was to be a research and training center. As the pet population grew, the DTCC began picking up unwanted and escaped tortoises around town.

It's true that funds have been cut to maintain the program to pick up, care for, treat, and release to the desert thousands of unwanted and stray pet desert tortoises. This glut of tortoises has been caused by careless backyard breeding. The cost to the DTCC for the pet program was huge and not part of the original mission. The DTCC will not continue this program. Instead, hopefully when the DTCC closes in fall of 2014, it can reopen as a small research and training facility.

How Can You Help?

Keep informed, tell your friends about the need for adoption, and donate to the effort to educate the public about overbreeding at www.tortoisegroup.org.

Feeding Your Tortoise

Why Won't My Tortoise Eat MegaDiet RF?

Reports are that most tortoises take right to MegaDiet RF and devour it. However, a very small percentage of them turn their beaks up at it and walk away. Suggestion: Make a salad of some favorites like grated carrot and broccoli, some chopped greens, and just a bit of MegaDiet RF very soft and juicy. Gradually increase to only MegaDiet RF. Salad or greens are not necessary for a tortoise diet, but a nice treat.

Note: Original MegaDiet is no longer available.

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 gazanias, new spineless cactus pads, other garden and desert plants (see [Information Sheet on Plants](#))



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	
<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	

33% discount to TG members

Seasonal Questions

Q. My tortoise escaped. How do I get him back?

A. First, put up signs on the mailboxes or light poles for at least 1 ½ blocks in all directions. Include the size of the tortoise and your phone number. A photo is a nice addition.

Next, go to the Animal Foundation at 655 N Mojave to the Lost Animal Department. Be sure you have a good idea of when the tortoise was lost. Look at the tortoises on site. Then ask staff to check their log book to see if a tortoise of your description has already been transferred. If so, obtain the reference number. Then call Tortoise Group at 281-2719. We will work with you to recover your tortoise.

Note: This is a good time to recheck your habitat for escape hatches and to be sure your gate barrier is in place when you are out doing yard work.



Godzilla is one of the lucky ones. He found his way home through the efforts of his family, the staff at The Animal Foundation, the DTCC, and Tortoise Group. Photo by Dean Campbell

Q. We're doing construction over the winter and I'm afraid to leave my tortoise in harm's way in his burrow. What should I do?

A. This year, have him brumate in a cardboard box large enough for him to turn around in. Cover the box lightly with a towel and put the box in a cool safe place that you can check regularly. Brumation

temperature should be between 35 and 50 degrees. Small tortoises should have a lid of water nearby. See our [Information Sheet](#) for details.

When the construction is finished, you can return your tortoise to his burrow even though he is very sleepy. Just place him at the entrance and slide him in gently. He'll find his way to a cozy spot for the rest of the winter.

Q. We found a hatchling. Is it legal to keep it? What do we do with it? Can it be outside all winter?

A. Yes, you can keep it. Please register it on the Tortoise Group website and you will be its legal custodian. We have some rounded rake roof tiles that make perfect burrows for the first few years. At the time you register, you can ask that we help you design a hatchling habitat or call the Hotline and ask for a Yard Consultation. Your tortoise should brumate in its new burrow, even this first year. See our [care booklet](#) for more on hatchlings.



Found by a student and given to her teacher, Lucky, the hatchling, has a new snug burrow using rake roof tiles. Top blocks overhang to prevent escape.

Brumation Strategies

Some time between mid September and early November, your tortoise will go into brumation. It can no longer warm its body enough for it to metabolize food and for it to do other tortoise things, so the tortoise's strategy is to literally "chill out" until the weather is warm enough again. That will be some time between late February and late April. Every tortoise has its own schedule.

Nice fall behavior. In this lovely cooler weather, your tortoise should be very active, eating and browsing. Male testosterone increases and seems to cause pacing. Your tortoise will stay out longer because of the perfect weather, so you'll have plenty of time to interact before the long winter.

Signs of change. Gradually you won't see your tortoise every day, then only two or three times a week, until it doesn't emerge again. Note that date, as it will go into brumation at just about the same date every year.

What to do before brumation

Soaking. As you see your tortoise getting ready to brumate, be sure to soak it several times in a shallow tub of water. It will lose moisture as it breathes all winter, so you want it well hydrated to start with.

Eating. Offer lots of food so that the body is well stocked for the winter. It's okay to feed right up to brumation if your tortoise is interested.

Location. Be sure that your tortoise is going to brumate in a safe, snug, well-insulated burrow. The less air circulation the better to retain moisture and warmth. Discourage your tortoise from digging a hole in a corner or under a damp bush. However, digging at this time is a natural behavior.

Coming inside. My tortoise wants to come inside more in fall than any other time, but after a short visit I plop him right back outside.

Brumation Musts

*Good feeding and a few soaks in the fall
A well-insulated burrow for brumation*

Winter winds. Last January when it was windy and cold, I wadded up a ball of newspaper, taped it so the paper would stay in a ball, and stuffed it in the mouth of Tad's burrow to cut down on the air circulation. I took it out after a few weeks when the weather warmed.



Dash, from the Desert Tortoise Conservation Center, digs into his MegaDiet on Day 1 at his new home. Missy LOVES her new brother. Dash is too large to translocate to the desert. Photo by K. Utiger

What to avoid

Brumating in the closet or under the bed. The temperature in a house is not cool enough for brumation. A tortoise outside brumates at ground temperature, around 35-50°F. Inside, at higher temperatures, a tortoise loses a great deal of moisture, doing a slow bake. A big tortoise can probably lose a good percentage of its water and still survive. Not so for a little one.

Brumating without cover. I was told of a tortoise that spent last winter in the corner of a patio. I marvel at the ability of tortoises to survive and can only imagine how that tortoise suffered. Amazing that it didn't freeze with our cold winter. Never leave a tortoise unprotected during brumation. The more insulation and protection outside the better.

We Need Your Help

**By Jeannie Stafford, Public Affairs Officer
US Fish and Wildlife Service's
Nevada Fish and Wildlife Office**

The Desert Tortoise Conservation Center (DTCC) is currently full and is on track to close in December 2014. Recent media stories have implied that tortoises are being euthanized because the DTCC is closing. This is not the case. We are not euthanizing healthy tortoises at the center.

As most of you know, the DTCC (established in 1990 to receive wild tortoises in harm's way from development) began accepting unwanted captive pet tortoises 1996. Unfortunately, uncontrolled captive tortoise breeding has resulted in hundreds of unwanted pets. Since 1996, the facility has taken in approximately 1,000 tortoises per year. Over 98 percent of these tortoises are unwanted captive pets and their progeny.

As we approach the closure of the DTCC, all healthy tortoises currently in the facility that are suitable for release to the wild will be relocated to sites that will support the recovery of the species. In the spring of 2013, the US Fish and Wildlife Service began a large-scale translocation effort in Trout Canyon, Nevada. Our goal is to place several hundred adults and several hundred juveniles at this site. Public scoping was just completed for a second translocation effort in an area south of Coyote Springs, Nevada. Healthy tortoises may be relocated into this area as early as spring 2014.

Some tortoises at the DTCC that are healthy, however, have experienced debilitating injuries that would compromise their survival in the wild. Others have grown in captivity to larger than normal size, which may negatively affect social interactions with wild tortoises. We are actively seeking homes for these individuals.

Although placing these unwanted captive pet tortoises into the wild is our preference, releasing unhealthy tortoises poses a threat to the continued conservation of this species in its native habitat. The number of unwanted captive pet tortoises that can be placed into the wild is limited by the health condition of the tortoises and the availability of suitable relocation areas. Some of the captive pet tortoises that come into the DTCC are diseased, malnourished, or otherwise in poor health, and run the risk of spreading disease to wild tortoises. Since the DTCC began receiving tortoises, euthanasia of *unhealthy* tortoises has been deemed both a measure of compassion and a measure of last resort to end the needless suffering of animals that obviously cannot be rehabilitated or are unresponsive to treatment.

Moving Forward. The primary role of the US Fish and Wildlife Service is recovery and continued conservation of desert tortoises in the wild. However, we are actively working with an array of partners including Tortoise Group, the Nevada Department of Wildlife, San Diego Zoo Global, and the Humane Society of the U.S., to find suitable solutions to the unwanted captive pet tortoise issue. We are looking at both long- and short-term solutions and will consider any viable options to help address this overwhelming issue.

We need your help. Help us stop the uncontrolled breeding of captive pet desert tortoises. Limit the number of tortoises per household to one or keep them separated and consider sterilization. Backyard breeding of pet tortoises is contributing to the problem of unwanted pets while diverting conservation resources away from efforts to recover desert tortoise in the wild.

Residents of southern Nevada can adopt a tortoise from the DTCC by submitting an Adoption Application at www.tortoisegroup.org

September General Meeting

Saturday, September 28, 1-3 pm

How Green is Your Generation

By Jim Moore, The Nature Conservancy

Jim will address the issue of enormous industrial-scale renewable energy facilities being built in the Mojave Desert on tortoise habitats. He will also highlight what The Nature Conservancy is doing to try to change the direction of the bad siting decisions that have been made recently to ensure that no future facilities are built in important ecological landscapes.

Brief Annual Meeting of Members

Auction

Come prepared for a lively auction of tortoise items and other goodies donated to Tortoise Group. Credit cards are accepted.

Quick Tip: Fall Behavior

- Changes in behavior—what to expect
- Preparing for brumation
- Winter challenges and solutions

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

Note: Original MegaDiet is no longer available.

All General Meetings

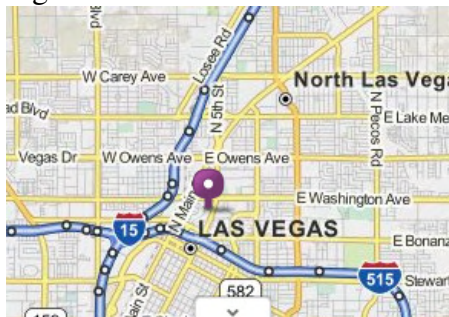
1 – 3 pm

Las Vegas Library

833 Las Vegas Boulevard North

Las Vegas, NV 89101

Right across from Cashman Center



Taking Tortoise Group to the Next Level: An Update

The bi-weekly Vision Committee meetings (two so far) have been highly productive, fun, and even brief! We've created the Mission and Vision and have started on the Goals and Objectives. The atmosphere is one of excitement and anticipation. By November we expect to begin the search for an Executive Director and an office. Please let us know if you have a space you could donate.

The Vision Committee includes facilitator Lisa Mayo DeRiso and members Larry Acedillo, Tina Bates, Laura Deitsch, Annette Magnus, George Stoecklin, and Kathy Utiger.



Who is the real Darwin? Photo by Nadine McAfee

Sterilization Coming Soon

A group of male and female tortoises was sent to Georgia for the purpose of developing a sterilization procedure. That procedure has been finalized, and soon the protocols will be available to veterinarians. We anticipate workshops to train Las Vegas vets in the procedure. Woo hoo!

The procedure is said to be easy and the recovery time brief. We don't yet know the approximate cost. Stay tuned. This could be the answer you have been looking for.

New custodians may adopt those sterilized tortoises. As of May 1, you'll recall that new custodians are limited to one tortoise, which implies that existing custodians may not add a tortoise.

About Plants

Several people have asked if it's safe to purchase tortoise plants from the nurseries which do not grow their plants organically. Several of us discussed this very topic and decided that over the years our tortoises had not experienced any ill effects from nursery-grown plants—that we know of. Please share your comments on this topic.

Plant sales abound at this season, so take advantage and spruce up your habitat with some good browsing plants. Refer to our [plant list](#) for ideas.

For Las Vegas, the Springs Preserve has sent out this notice. We might find some desert plants there like favorite primroses and globe mallow.

**SPRINGS PRESERVE®**





Autumn Plant Sale
Save big on native and desert-friendly plants

Save big on desert-adapted plant species at our [Autumn Plant Sale](#), **Sept. 21 from 8 a.m. to 2 p.m.** Find plants the nurseries simply don't have, plus get tips from the experts on planting and care.

[Members](#), enjoy a special preview sale from 7 to 8 a.m.!

Springs Preserve
333 S. Valley View Blvd. at U.S. 95
Open daily from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m.


Buy Tickets Address/Directions

Free Drip Irrigation Class
Learn the complete installation from the street to the plants, including how to select and assemble components of this

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

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	3. Check amount you wish for your 1-year membership
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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
702-560-5519

Editor Kathy Utiger

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

Public Educations Works!

I built a new den this year from the instructions on your website so my male tortoise (for the 1st time in his life) is in a proper den. He didn't come out for about 10 days!

And I see from the July newsletter that that is normal. If you build that den to your website's specifications...it stays at about 88°. I found a good home for my female (they added her in their will! and followed your same den building instructions) so that I am no longer adding to the over-population problem.



Father Tortoise poses in front of his beautiful new burrow! Photo by Mom

Thank you for being there! You have such important information for tortoise owners. Living in Arizona, I appreciate someone out there keeping us educated on being good tortoise Moms! THANK YOU.
Karen Becraft

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