

# Tortoise Group Newsletter

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

Volume XXVII No. 1 March 2014

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

Las Vegas, Nevada

## Tortoise Group Is on Its Way!

### Strategic Plan

Before her death our founder, Betty Burge, left Tortoise Group a fund with the charge that it be used to “take Tortoise Group to the next level.” The organization she envisioned had wide-ranging programs, a staff, and could support and influence the community in a self-sustaining manner. With the considerable help of long-time Tortoise Group friend Jim Gans, we began the process in July 2013.

A Vision Committee of members Larry Acedillo, Tina Bates, Laura Deitsch, Annette Magnus, George Stoecklin, and Kathy Utiger worked with consultant Lisa Mayo-DeRiso to develop a Strategic Plan. That Plan was finalized in January 2014!

### Hiring an Executive Director!

As outlined in the Strategic Plan, we began a search in November for an Executive Director, which culminated in the hiring of Jim Cornall in February. Meet Jim and his family on page 7.

### First Tortoise Group Office

Kathy Gillespie, Tortoise Group member and owner of A&B Printing at 2908 S Highland, generously donated space in her building to be our very first office! Jim will be based there. We'll have room for staff meetings, MegaDiet sales, and tortoise information. Watch for the grand opening festivity!

### The Success Factor – YOU!

Great plans for community outreach and education look good on paper. But, the ingredient for success is YOU. I ask each of you to find a way to give a portion of your time, your talent, and/or your resources. When we reach out for volunteers, please respond with enthusiasm. Help Jim, the Board, and all of Tortoise Group our dream a reality. Thank you. Kathy Utiger, Chairperson



Again this year, Chuck Norris is the first tortoise reported out -- February 16. Photo by Dave Phillips

**Prevent Tortoise Breeding**  
***Please Separate a Mating Pair***

### Fast Facts

- Updated – [Plants to Grow for Tortoises](#)
- New - list of [Plants Poisonous to Tortoises](#)
- Adoption Stats for 2013
  - Adopted – 23
  - Returned to Custodian – 3
  - Transferred – 14
- DTCC scheduled to close in December 2014
- Keep up to date on current pet and wild tortoise issues. Check the [Home page](#).

**Be legal. [Register](#) your tortoise on the Tortoise Group website**

## 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 RF Sellers

Please call sellers for appointment. 702-Area code

Check map for [MegaDiet RF Seller locations](#)

Nellis & Owens	Georgi – 459 -1274
Ann & Camino al Norte	Don – 374-2466
Durango & Grand Teton	Cathy – 339-5012
Decatur & Gowan	Toni – 277-6179
Smoke Ranch & Michael Way	Julie – 245-4671
215 & Far Hills	Kathy & Pauline – 804-0472
Rainbow & Charleston	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

Russell & Pecos	Sherri – 339-9821
Russell & Nellis	Cindy – 530-9052
Boulder Hwy & Equestrian	Carm – 451-3245
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>Lone Mountain Animal Hospital</i>	645-3116
Rainbow & US95	

<i>Aloha Animal Hospital</i>	567-5222
S Torrey Pines & Warm Springs	

<i>Moon Sun Landscapes</i>	645-2032
Russell & Boulder Hwy	

**33% discount to TG members**

## Spring Activities for the Custodian

### Habitat Cleanup

If you are like us, your tortoise always emerges before your yard is cleaned up for spring. Then there's a big rush to remove all the tortoise traps and make the yard safe for the shelly one. Our windy weather always brings in litter. Little bits of foil and plastic attract the tortoise since they can be brightly colored like flowers.

- Be sure to pick up even the tiny bits in this first spring cleanup and then after each big wind.
- Look around your yard with an eye to new tortoise hazards. If your tortoise is growing, think about new places for it to get stuck.
- Keep leaves and grasses from blowing into the burrow

### Record Keeping

- Mark down the date your tortoise came out of brumation
- Record the weight and measure the length of the shell several times during the season

### Perform an External Exam

- See if the nostrils are runny or bubbly (Slight whistling sound may be normal)
- Check that the eyes are clear and not watery, crusty, or swollen
- Look over the shell for any changes
- Check the limbs for signs of injury

### Soak Your Tortoise

Your tortoise will have lost precious water over the winter. When your tortoise has basked and is warm, soak it in lukewarm water. (Refer to p.5 [September 2013](#) issue for details and photos)

Here's a link to our [Information Sheet](#) with details on performing this external exam.

### Residents of southern Nevada

No tortoise? Adopt one this year!  
Begin by submitting an  
[Adoption Application](#)



**Pepita's right limbs atrophied from a rubber band that blew into the burrow. Photo by Gretchen Hau**

Pepita is missing her front paw and part of her hind leg. More than 20 years ago a rubber band must have blown into her burrow and gotten wrapped around her right front paw and hind leg. Both limbs atrophied. A vet put half a billiard ball on her chest so she could get around.

Her "mom" was traumatized, but Pepita is still with us and doing well. Her partner, Jose, is larger and strong and healthy. Luckily, she can't have babies.

### Seeing into the Burrow

#### Using a Cell Phone

Clever folks in Tortoise Group report having video recorded tortoise doings in the burrow by fastening the cell phone to a long pole. They turn on the video and slide the pole down the burrow.

#### Using a Mirror

Reflecting sunlight into the burrow with a mirror is the best daytime method. The sun is, of course, thousands of times brighter than any flashlight. See [Information Sheet](#) on this method. A flashlight works best at night.

View short presentation  
["Early Spring Care"](#)



## Weeds—Which Ones Are Good?

### Bad Weeds

Spring brings a bloom of invasive weeds, whether we have had a lot of rain or not. You will want to remove these weeds from your yard and your tortoise habitat before they go to seed.

Be sure to remove weeds completely, by grasping the plant at the base and pulling it gently to remove the entire root. In spring it's easy to remove the entire plant while the earth is soft and damp. In summer you'll need a digging tool.

### Mustard Weed (bad weed)



Field of tall, mature mustard

Yellow mustard blossoms can easily grow 1-2 feet high

### Cheatgrass (bad weed)

The hard seed pods of cheatgrass can lodge in the mouth of a tortoise and prevent it from eating.



Cheatgrass becomes hard and brittle when it dries in summer

### Will My Tortoise Eat the Bad Weeds?

No. Pull them up. But if you are unsure about a plant, allow your tortoises to evaluate it. The tortoise will sniff it, and sniff it, maybe even try a bite or two, and then leave it alone. Pull that plant out.

Unless they are extremely hungry, tortoises will ignore plants that are not good for them, even poisonous ones.

### Thistle (bad weed) vs Dandelion (good weed)



This thistle is hard to distinguish from a dandelion. Look carefully at the leaves:

- Grow upward
- Can be purplish in color
- Spiky

The thistle can have shoots of 1-2 feet with leaves and blossoms

**This thistle looks a lot like a dandelion. Pull it out!**



### Dandelion, a tortoise favorite and very nutritious (very very good weed)

Dandelion leaves grow flat with only the individual blossoms sticking up. Let a few flowers go to seed, harvest, and [plant following our guidelines](#).



#### Where Will I Find These Weeds?

Seeds blow into cracks, depressions, and against other plants. They will germinate where there is moisture.

Look for weeds at the edges of sidewalks or where there is runoff from sprinklers.

### Spurge (good weed)



### Heron's bill filaree (good weed)





## Calendar of Events 2014\*

Meetings have several fun and interesting parts: current tortoise news, questions and stories, a presentation on seasonal behavior, refreshments, and a main speaker. Our meetings are now videotaped and available on the website.

### March 22—Free tortoise plants!

“Raising a Healthy Tortoise,” by Dr. Erin Wilkins  
Creature Comforts Veterinary Hospital

### April 19 (Saturday)

Field Trip to the Desert Tortoise Conservation Center. See Column 2 for details.

### May 17

“Overview of the Clark County Multiple Species Habitat Conservation Plan and Conserving the Desert Tortoise” by Marci Henson, Assistant Director of Comprehensive Planning

### June 21

“New Studies on Tortoise Foods” by Jennifer Parsons, Nutritionist, San Diego Zoo

### July 19

“Creating and Upgrading a Tortoise Habitat” by Kathy Utiger, Tortoise Group Chairperson

### August 16

“Solar Development in Nevada” by Jim Moore, The Nature Conservancy

### September 20

TBA

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. Credit Cards are accepted.

## All General Meetings

1 – 3 pm

Las Vegas Library

833 Las Vegas Boulevard North

Las Vegas, NV 89101

Right across from Cashman Center

\*Additional events to be announced by email

## Field Trip to the Desert Tortoise Conservation Center (DTCC)

Since the DTCC is closing at the end of 2014, this will be the final field trip to see the site and to understand how the tortoises are cared for and transferred to the desert.

The field trip is **limited to:**

- Current members of Tortoise Group (have paid dues in 2014)
- People who have not visited the DTCC before
- People over the age of 10

### How Do I Sign Up?

Email [info@tortoisegroup.org](mailto:info@tortoisegroup.org) with the subject line “DTCC Field Trip.” Tell us who is coming.

### Saturday, April 19, 9:30-noon

Meet at Exploration Park, Buffalo & Blue Diamond  
We will leave by car pool for the DTCC at 9:45.

DTCC personnel will lead a trek over uneven desert terrain looking at tortoises and enjoying the desert, with plenty of time for tortoise questions. If you’re not up to the trip, you’ll want to check out the slide show on our Home page. It’s a dandy.

Be prepared for desert conditions: bring a hat, sunscreen, long-sleeved top and good walking shoes. You may take photos for personal use.



The dogs looked for their new brother all winter!  
Finally he’s out!

Photo by Cheryl Stereff

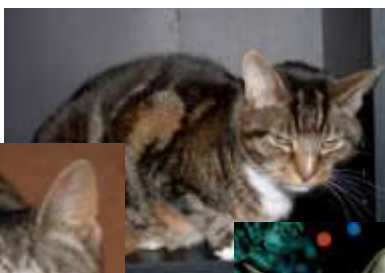
### Meet Our Executive Director!!!

Jim Cornall has taken up the gauntlet to lead Tortoise Group in its new Vision. Full of fresh ideas and eager to begin implementing the Strategic Plan, Jim is settling into our brand new office and has already attended two important tortoise meetings! The transformation has begun!

Jim comes to us from a non-profit aquarium in New Brunswick, Canada, where he was the Manager and Communications Director. Come meet Jim at the March 22 meeting.



Jim Cornall, Tortoise Group Executive Director, with wife Liz and son Becket (just 2 years old)



Nicola, Abbey, Cliss, Sabian, Pepper, Ringo

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      2014

☐ 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**  
**702-560-5519**

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

**Unwanted Pet Desert Tortoises**

“My males are fighting!” “I’m moving out of state.” “I want to separate my breeding pair!” “The bank is foreclosing and I’m moving into an apartment!” “My mother died and her tortoise needs a home!” We receive calls like these from people desperately looking for a home for a beloved pet, or sometimes for a tortoise they found in the street.

Until last year, a service would pick up unwanted tortoises and take them to the Desert Tortoise Conservation Center (DTCC). That service ended last year. This year the DTCC is not accepting any new pet tortoises and **at this time** there is no place to take an unwanted tortoise. Note that it is illegal to release a pet tortoise into the wild. It could carry disease or overpopulate an already-fragile desert area.

**What Do I Do with an Unwanted Tortoise?**

**Find someone to take the tortoise.** Ask them to register it and prepare their yard using our guidelines. We’ll be glad to help.

**If it’s a found tortoise,** check our Facebook page to see if anyone has lost one in your area. They can keep it themselves or find someone to take it. [Register](#) it on our website to make it legally theirs, and contact us to help them design a habitat

