

rtoise Group Newsletter

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

Volume XVIII No. 1, March 2005

www.tortoisegroup.org

Las Vegas, Nevada

Tortoise Coming Out Party – A Celebration of Emergence from Hibernation

Start 2005 out right for you and your tortoise by attending our first meeting, Emergence Workshop on March 19. A veterinarian will show us how to give a physical exam. We'll ID tortoises, have MegaDiet displays and for sale, show some plants and other ideas for yard safety and improvements, and we'll treat ourselves to root beer floats! Bring one awake tortoise if you want to have a microchip implanted. Turn to page 2 for details.

2005 Schedule

March 19

Tortoise "Coming Out Party," an Emergence Workshop. 1–3 pm
NV State Museum. Map on p. 8

April 3

Field Trip to the Tortoise Release
Site Details on p.5

April 23

Summerlin Earthfaire 2005
Details on p. 8

May 1

Field Trip to Desert Tortoise
Conservation Center

June 18

How a Tortoise Works-Part I,
guest speaker

July 16

Exotic Tortoises, guest speaker

August 20

How a Tortoise Works, Part II,
guest speaker

September 17

Ice Cream Social and Photo
Contest/Annual Meeting

What's Up in Your Yard?

In my yard, about three-fourths of the ground is usually bare – no grass, just soil and a few scattered rocks. That bare ground is now covered with short wild Split Grass and Filaree or Heron's Bill. Tortoises do not eat much Split Grass, but it does provide seeds for birds.

Dense growth makes it hard for hatchlings to travel the yard, so I make sure there are soil pathways for them through the Split Grass. Filaree has dark green feathery leaves and very small pinkish purple flowers. Tortoises like filaree. Then there is Mustard! I remove it as soon as I see it, because it goes to seed soon after appearing. It has deeply cut leaves and very small yellow flowers that produce many seeds. You can get ahead of mustard if you remove the plants before they flower. Unfortunately they are often the most common weeds and tortoises do not usually eat them.

In my yard, I have a nice crop of the important tortoise food, the perennial dandelion. However, there are a few species of annual dandelions that I always remove. You can identify them by the stem that may grow up to two feet high.

These annuals die in late spring but the long, unattractive stems remain and the seeds are plentiful. Happy weeding!

Betty Burge

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When Will My Tortoise Wake Up?

Some tortoises do not emerge for the first time until the third week in April. Other come out in early March and may spend the next few weeks under a shrub. Others have different patterns of emergence and activity. We will be talking about this and what to do when we meet at the "Coming Out Party," our first program of the season, March 19. See "Taking the Bull by the Horns" on page 2.

**Taking the Bull by the Horns:
ID for Your Tortoise**
*March 19, 1–3 pm, Emergence
Workshop, NV state Museum.*
See map on page 8

We have mentioned the many reports from sad tortoise owners who have lost their tortoises. Most tortoises had no external identification. As a result, there was little chance of that special pet's being returned home.

ID Tag on Shell. We are going to take the matter in hand and as part of our first interactive workshop program, a "Coming Out Party" on March 19th. We will help you practice what is involved in affixing an ID tag to your tortoise's shell. The tag will have your phone number, be harmless, and should stay in place for years. Because this technique takes some practice, we will not be using tortoises. You don't want to make a mess on your handsome pet because the epoxy won the race and hardened before you were finished.

Microchip Implantation. If you adopted a tortoise from Tortoise Group, your tortoise will probably have an external tag and microchip ID under its skin. If your tortoise has no tag or chip or we find that the chip has stopped working, we will have a specialist inject another – a simple procedure. There will be a charge of \$6 to cover the cost.

Please bring only one of your tortoises that has awakened.

It must be at least 7 inches in shell length.

Health Checkup for Your Tortoise

A veterinarian will go through what is involved in giving your tortoise an external exam for major problems. If you have a tortoise that is awake, bring it in a cardboard box that has a lid that will keep the inside dark but let in some air. The sides should be too tall for the tortoise to climb out. Line the bottom with a section or two of newspaper and bring a large old towel.

We will share information and questions about behavior, diet, and other topics timely for this time of year.



Rocky with Jean Nelson, owner

**Tortoise Adoptions
and Consultations
Are Free
Call 739-8043**

After the Rain---The Good and the Bad

Get your cameras ready for a trip to the desert. The flowers should be glorious. But before you go, if you have not seen your tortoise sleeping in its burrow or venturing out for a bit of sun, think about this: Your tortoise may be buried under heavy, collapsed soil and not have sufficient air or be able to dig out, especially if the tortoise has dug beyond the plywood roofing.

After every rainy winter, we receive calls about tortoises that were dug up too late to save them. What a way to die! Make the effort to dig up the burrow if your tortoise is out of sight. It's a bit of work, but here's a suggestion for making it easier. Dig a vertical shaft a few inches to the side of where you think the tortoise is resting, digging down to the level of the burrow floor. Then carefully dig sideways through the burrow wall. The hole should be just large enough for you to see and remove the tortoise, if necessary.

Repairing a hole dug this way can be much easier than having to replace all the heavy wet soil from the top of the roof. The hole through the burrow wall can be patched with a piece of lumber against which you can pack the soil as you fill the vertical shaft.

Connections between Humans and Tortoises/Turtle

By Karen Kampfer

We like each other!

Although the majority of documentation on relationships between humans and various reptile species and their bond and/or interaction has been largely through anecdotal stories or by word of mouth, these impressions and observations can be quite thought provocative. Additionally, the professional literature is increasingly enriched with a more scientific study of the relationships between human and reptiles, including those that are relevant to humans and tortoises. Consider the following information and judge for yourself!

Reptilian species such as lizards, snakes, and turtles have been successfully introduced with other animals in Animal-Assisted Therapy (AAT) programs. AAT programs have been noted to assist the elderly and adolescents inpatient and outpatient treatment programs for a variety of physical, psychological or other conditions or circumstances. In some cases, reptiles appear to

be a therapeutic presence to people in these situations (Melson, 2001).

Bowers and Burghardt (1992) provide an exceptional review and discussion of the relationships between humans and reptiles in their book chapter which examines the human/reptile bond and reptilian recognition of particular humans, specifically their caretakers. In their writings, Bowers and Burkhart cite descriptive documentation dating back to the 19th century describing alligator and tortoise behavior which appeared affectionate toward certain humans. In the late 1800's, a particular tortoise was observed to come to the call of only certain people. This tortoise seemingly showed what can be loosely termed as "affection" by tapping its beak on the caretakers' feet. Some have speculated that the tortoise may have been gathering sensory information through smell or eliciting feeding, while others have interpreted the tortoise's actions as an affectionate or attention getting behavior.

There are also reports that cite 20th century examples of giant equatorial tortoises in the Philadelphia Zoo who have been noted to seek attention and neck scratching from humans who are familiar to them. Giant Aldabaran and Galapagos tortoises at the Philadelphia Zoo have been noted to particularly respond to one caretaker, John Groves, a curator at the facility. The giant tortoises have been observed to rise up on their legs in their caretaker's presence and make gestures for neck scratching from John. One tortoise in particular will nip at John's leg if his solicitations are ignored, until he scratches the giant tortoise's neck! Other tortoises have reportedly learned from watching this activity, and also solicited neck scratching from John and other familiar keepers. These observations indicate that attention and scratching are reinforcing aspects for the tortoises to interact with human caretakers.

(Part 1 of 3. Look for more in the next newsletters.)

Karen Kampfer is a Doctoral Candidate in Clinical Psychology at Pacifica Graduate Institute. She is currently in the process of composing her dissertation based on the analysis of the questionnaire data that was distributed in the May 2003 Tortoise Group Newsletter which explored human/tortoise interactions. The above information is derived from Karen's preliminary research into the motivations and meaning of Desert Tortoises in the lives of their Caretakers. Karen looks forward to sharing the final results of this research with Tortoise Group members and newsletter recipients this year!

Tortoises on Parade: A Photo Contest & Ice Cream Social

Was a fabulous success was our annual meeting featuring our first photo contest and ice cream social! Three of the entries are in this newsletter; more to follow.

Now is the time to start snapping photos of your tortoise for this fall's contest. The photos will also provide a wonderful journal of your tortoise's summer of 2005. Enjoy!

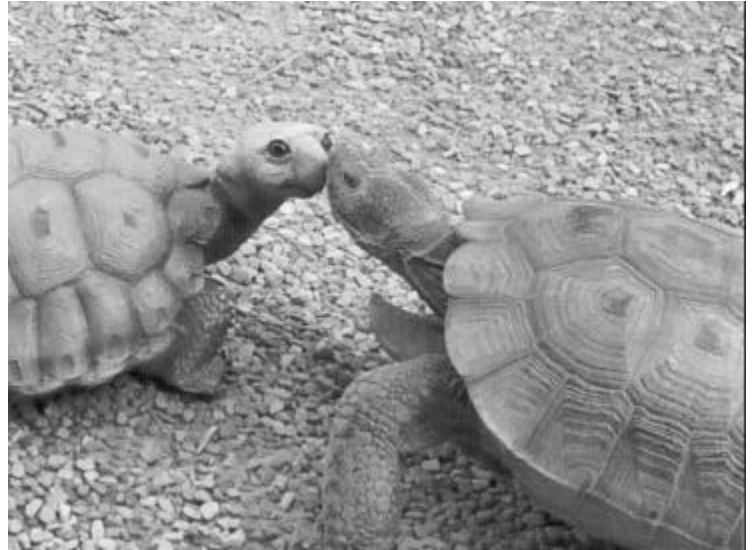
It's Very Interactive

Join Jerry Shupe and Betty Burge in visiting yards of prospective adopters. Each yard presents interesting differences and challenges. What we do is an important step between the information in our care pamphlet and how it applies to each yard. Our hosts appreciate these visits and the adopted tortoises benefit.

If you live north of Charleston Boulevard, you would join Jerry. Betty takes care of those living south of Charleston. We try to avoid the times of heaviest traffic and most severe temperatures when we make appointments. Weekends are part of our schedule. Call Betty, 739-8043.

Limited Supply of Tiles for Hatchling Burrows

Have you prepared burrows for your hatchlings and juveniles less than 3 inches in shell length? If not, we still have some Rounded Rake Roof tiles that are perfect for the little ones and so easy to install. These tiles are no longer being made, but we are fortunate to still have a source and some on hand. Read about the advantages of these tiles in our May 2003 Care Pamphlet and Information Sheet #14 on our website. Call Betty, 739-8043, about purchasing two or three for each baby tortoise burrow. The tiles cost \$2.50 each.



"Beware of Painted Ladies" by Audrey and Merrill Larsh. Ribbon for Cutest Couple



**"And she thought she could keep those yummy plants from me!" by Susan Stater
Ribbon for Most Mischievous**

Field Trip to Tortoise Release Site near Jean, Nevada

When: Sunday morning, April 3

Note: First day of Daylight Saving Time

Where to meet: See Directions below

Time: 9:00 AM

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.

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 left, which is across the street from the Nevada Landing Casino.

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.

Very Important Note

This outing is not appropriate for young children. We will walk quietly and carefully within the habitat, always on the lookout for tortoises or things of interest. We will treat the habitat with the utmost respect and care.

Children naturally want to run around outside, pick up sticks, kick rocks, tussle, and generally glory in the desert. Such behavior would frighten tortoises and possibly result in crushing burrows or hatchlings, which are very difficult to see. Unless your children have an interest in learning about the habitat and can walk at your pace, please come without them. And of course, no pets.

Mark the date on your calendar, now. Hope to see you there. We expect to have a great time.

Moving?

If you are moving, please notify us of your new address---that includes your new email address. Thanks. We appreciate your taking time to help us stay in touch.

Websites of Interest

Tortoise Group	www.tortoisegroup.org
Desert Tortoise Council	www.deserttortoise.org
California Turtle and Tortoise Club	www.tortoise.org
Tortoise Trust (United Kingdom and the USA)	www.tortoisetrust.org
American Tortoise Rescue (Southern California)	www.tortoise.com
Desert Tortoise Preserve Committee (California)	www.tortoise-tracks.org
Clark County School District Education Website	www.ccsd.net

Satellite Sellers of MegaDiet Desperately Needed

Selling MegaDiet from your home is truly a gratifying job that requires a only little time each week. If you live in the east Las Vegas Valley, Northeast, North Las Vegas, Northwest, Summerlin, or another location, you could be a tremendous help to MegaDiet users by becoming a Satellite Seller. Call Betty for details, 739-8043.

Snazzy Tortoise Group License Plate Holders

Help promote Tortoise Group with our nifty new license plate holders. The text reads, "Call the Experts" and "www.TortoiseGroup.org." Drop by the meeting and pick one up. Buy one for \$5.00 and get one free!

Annual Meeting Report

At the Annual Meeting in September 2004, the members elected Betty Burge, Chairman; Kathy Utiger, Vice-Chairman; Maureen O'Sullivan, Secretary; and Trilla Newton, Treasurer. There was no new or old business, so the meeting was brief and we were able to get on the photo contest and ice cream!

MEGADIET Satellite Sellers

Please call sellers for appointment.

Charleston & Rancho	Carolyn – 878-4297
Charleston & Nellis	<i>Seeking volunteer</i>
Ann Rd. & Decatur	<i>Seeking volunteer</i>
Summerlin Area	Kathy – 804-0472 (evenings & weekends)
Tropicana & Maryland	Betty – 739-8043
Henderson, 89015	Laurie – 558-6985 (after 1:00 pm)
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 monthly Tortoise Group meetings.

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

Tortoise Group Membership Form

All or part of memberships and contributions should be tax deductible

Name _____	Phone _____	Individual 15.00 _____
Address _____		Family 25.00 _____
City _____	State _____ Zip Code _____	Sustaining 35.00 _____
		Sponsor 50.00 _____
		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**

PLANTS TO GROW FOR TORTOISES

Grass

Bermuda (common Bermuda, not hybrid, is preferred)

Perennial ornamentals

Mexican Evening Primrose, *Oenothera berlandieri*, (Invasive, surround with several feet of dry soil.)

Ivy Geranium, *Pelargonium pelatum* (Has a trailing habit within reach of tortoises).

Verbena, *Verbena* spp.

Gazania, *Gazania* spp. (somewhat spreading)

Hollyhock, *Alcea rosea* (leaves and flowers)

Ground covers

White clover, *Trifolium repens*

Carpet Bugle, *Ajuga reptans*, (Low, spreading with short spikes of blue flowers)

Shrubs

Desert Willow, *Chilopsis linearis* (flowers, purple or white spring through fall)

Rose, *Rosa* (leaves and flowers)

Chinese Bellflower, *Abutilon* hybrids (leaves, flowers yellow, red, and orange. Needs shade.)

Hibiscus, *Hibiscus* (Usually needs protection in winter)

Globe Mallow, *Sphaeralcea* spp.

Yellow Trumpets, *Stenolobium (Tecoma) stans*, (Many large flowers, spring an summer, attracts hummingbirds, too.)

Spineless Cactus, *Opuntia ficus-indica* (new pads, only, flowers, fruit--prickly pears. Irrigate to produce sufficient new pads. Pads ready to produce are available free from Tortoise Group, 739-8043)

Vines

Hall's Honeysuckle, *Lonicera japonica "Halliana"*

Grape, *Vitis* spp (young leaves only, no fruit)

Morning Glory, *Ipomoea* spp (the perennial vine))

Trees

Elm, *Ulmus* spp. and Mulberry, *Morus*, spp. (Offer young leaves only. Old leaves are high in tannin which interferes with protein metabolism).

Annuals

Petunia

Portulaca (Moss Rose) *Portulaca grandiflora*

Nasturtium, *Tropaeolum* spp. (Plant from seed).

WEEDS THAT MAY VOLUNTEER IN YOUR YARD

Perennials

Dandelion, *Taraxacum officinale* **An important food to plant, especially for hatchlings.**

Annuals

Filaree or Heron's Bill, *Erodium cicutarium*

Spurge, *Euphorbia* spp. Usually grows very low, milky juice. Common in summer and fall

TOXIC PLANTS

Rhubarb, *Rheum rhabarbarum* (leaves)

Tomato, *Lycopersicon* spp. (plants)

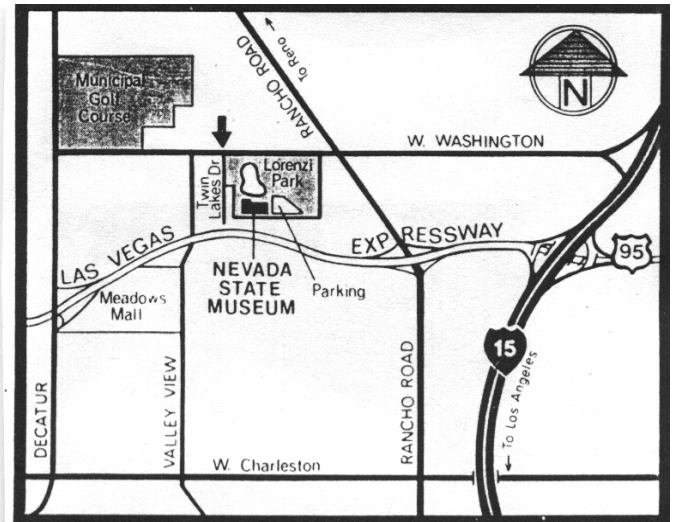
Chinaberry Tree, *Melia azederach umbracalifera*

Oleander, *Nerium oleander* (leaves and flowers)

Summerlin Earthfaire

Visit the Tortoise Group booth at the Summerlin Earthfaire, Saturday, April 23. The event will be held from 10 am – 3 pm in Summerlin Center Community Park, on Town Center between Charleston and Sahara.

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



RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

5157 Poncho Circle
Las Vegas, NV 89119



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