

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

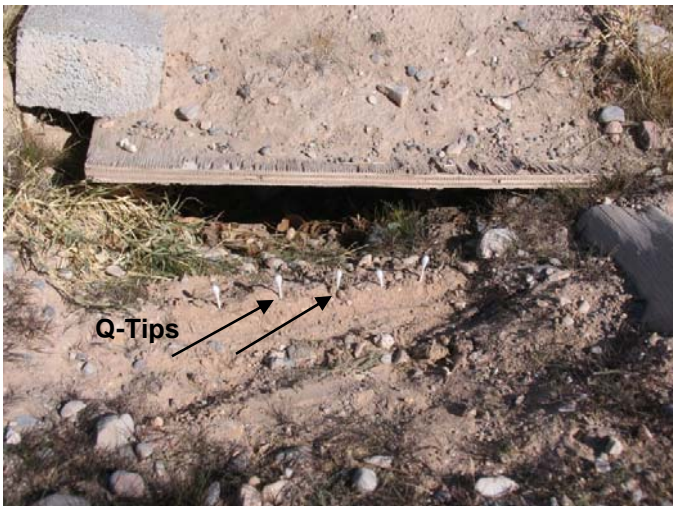
VOL. XIX No. 1 March 2006

www.tortoisegroup.org

Las Vegas, Nevada

Is My Tortoise Out Yet?

Want to know if your tortoise has emerged when you were not home? Perhaps the soil or rocks leave no tracks at the opening. Create a ridge of soil across the opening. Along the top, lightly insert several wispy twigs, stems, or Q-Tips. Chances are that if you find them knocked down, it was the tortoise. If you have a curious cat or dog, watch. They may have to get over the novelty of the new odor before the sticks become an indicator of tortoise activity.



Q-Tip barrier shows tortoise activity

New Policy on Injured Tortoises

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service now asks the public to do the following if they find an injured tortoise in southern Nevada: Collect it, take it home and call the Tortoise Pickup Service 702-593-9027, immediately. This rescue includes tortoises found in the desert and those found presumably wandering in developed areas.

Life Memberships

Have you been thinking of becoming a Life Member but you just haven't done it yet? The year 2006 will be the last year that you can purchase a

Life Membership for \$200. Beginning in 2007, the amount will increase to \$500.

Volunteer Festivity at March Meeting

Tortoise Group will honor its Very Special Tortoise People, the volunteers, with root beer floats at a reception to kick off the 2006 season. Volunteers will have a chance to share their experience with anyone wishing to get involved. Catch the Tortoise Group spirit in 2006!

Following the reception, at about 1:30, Betty Burge will talk about sprucing up your yard, tortoise safety, tortoise plants and weeds, and giving you tortoise a health check on emergence. Don't miss this great beginning. **Free tortoise flowers for everyone!**

Invitation to the Public to Serve on the Desert Conservation Program (DCP) Advisory Committee

"The Desert Conservation Program Advisory Committee is an independent advisory group convened by Clark County in its capacity as the Multiple Species Habitat Conservation Plan (MSHCP) Administrator. The Advisory Committee broadly represents the diverse interests and needs of the communities and government agencies in the Las Vegas valley as they relate to the implementation of the MSHCP and associated Incidental Take Permit under the federal Endangered Species Act."

The public is being invited to serve on the DCP Advisory Committee. To learn about the committee, the various levels of participation, and to obtain an application, call or email Betty Burge at 702-739-8043 or tortoisegroup@att.net. The application must be submitted by 12 noon, March 10.

Question Corner

By Betty Burge

Q. My neighbor's tortoise is up and eating and mine is nowhere to be seen. It is mid-March already. When can I expect him to emerge?

A. Individual tortoises vary in the date they emerge for the first time in the "spring." The date may vary from year to year. Some emerge at the end of February, others not until late April. March and April are the months that most tortoises emerge for the first time. Early risers may not become active for a week or more and may only emerge to bask and then return either to the burrow or to shallow cover. Remember that by late winter the burrow has become very cold. A tortoise that has been basking will lose much of the heat it has gained if it returns to that cold burrow. Late risers may be ready to eat in a day or so. First-emergence behavior among tortoises varies widely. If you are concerned, check the burrow for collapsed soil that may prevent the tortoise from leaving the burrow. This is more likely to happen if we have a lot of rain during the winter. Watch for grazing as an indication that your tortoise is ready to digest food. Then offer MegaDiet.

Q. How can I prevent bladder stones?
(see example at right)

A. It should help to keep your tortoise well hydrated. The solid or semi-solid urate salts that are the by-product of protein metabolism will be passed when the tortoise voids the liquid portion of the urine, so keep those bladders filled with sufficient water. Some tortoises do not show any interest in the water dish unless it rains. We suggest that you occasionally place the tortoise in the water dish. Be sure that the diameter is wide enough for that. Or use a basin with slightly warm water filled to a level that is below the nostrils. Stay with the tortoise until it wants to get out. Making a puddle in the soil may be accepted more readily by the tortoise, but it is more wasteful of water.

**MegaDiet
Satellite Sellers**

Please call sellers for appointment

- Camino al Norte & W. Ann Rd
Greg – 649-1630
- Cheyenne & US95 **Seeking volunteer**
- Nellis & Owens Georgi – 459-1274
- Summerlin Kathy – 804-0472
- Rainbow & Alta Sherri – 255-1357
- Charleston & Rancho **Seeking volunteer**
- Tropicana & Maryland Betty – 739-8043
- Industrial & Blue Diamond
Carolyn – 876-0668, ext. 874
- Henderson, 89015 Laurie – 558-6985
(after 11:00 am)
- Henderson, 89015 **Seeking second volunteer**
- Pahrump Sheri – 775-727-5557
- Out-of-town 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**



Bladder stone measures about 3 ½" x 3" x 2" thick

Spring Meeting Schedule

March 11, Saturday

Refreshing Your Habitat & Volunteer Reception

Time: 1:00 – 3:00 pm

Place: Nevada State Museum and Historical Society (in Lorenzi Park – see map below)

Volunteer Reception: Have a root beer float in honor of those who help Tortoise Group. Do you want to volunteer but wonder what's really involved? We will gather in informal groups to answer your questions, however small.

Refreshing Your Habitat: Tips from Betty Burge

We will talk and show slides about sprucing up your yard for spring. You will see samples of some of the common weeds. Some are good tortoise food, while others are not worth allowing to take over. Also, learn what to do when tortoises first emerge.

Pick up free flowers for your tortoise.



April 8, Saturday

Environmentally Friendly Pest Control

Time: 10 am – noon

Place: Desert Demonstration Gardens
3701 W. Alta Drive

Learn pest control that's safe for tortoises from the experts at the Gardens. To reserve a place for this highly popular tortoise topic, call 258-3205 from 2 – 5 pm, Wed. – Sat. (see map above). Visit the Tortoise Group booth with your questions.

April 22, Saturday

Summerlin Earthfaire 2006

Time: 10 am – 4 pm

Place: Summerlin Centre Community Park

Visit the Tortoise Group information booth along with many other environmental displays.

April 23, Sunday

Backyard Habitat Tour in Green Valley

Time: 9 – 10 am to noon

Place: Sunset Park parking lot, to pick up a map (Turn into the park just south of Sunset off Eastern. Look for the big Tortoise Group sign.)

See several interesting ways that others have developed safe and delicious habitats for their tortoises. Pick up a map between 9 and 10 am and tour several yards at your own speed. Note: this wonderful learning opportunity is not appropriate for young children.

May 7, Sunday

Field Trip to the Desert Tortoise Conservation Center (DTCC)

Time: 9 am – noon

Place: DTCC (directions below)

Tour the DTCC inside and out. Learn from facility manager Michelle McDermott how tortoises came to be held at the DTCC and about research past and present. See tortoises of all sizes. This wonderful outdoor activity is also a great chance to swap tortoise stories and learn from others.

New Directions: Travel west on Blue Diamond to Buffalo (app. 1 mile west of Rainbow, the old turnoff). At Buffalo, turn left (south) and continue until it ends at Starr Rd. Turn left (east) to Rainbow. Again turn left and go a very short distance to the power line road, which takes you to the DTCC. Only the power line road is unpaved now! Look for the Tortoise Group signs.

Dr. K's Kolumn

**By Christine Kolmstetter, DVM
Cheyenne West Animal Hospital**

Tortoises are unique animals that offer many challenges to those of us who provide veterinary care for them. What I would like to do in the upcoming series of veterinary columns is to share with you some of the significant differences between tortoises and other animals, aspects of the physical examination that enable us to determine a healthy tortoise from an unhealthy one, the diagnostic tests that are available to assess overall health and diagnose disease, and some of the surgical procedures that we can perform in order to improve the quality of life for these animals when they are debilitated. So let's get started!

Do you ever wonder why your veterinarian asks you so many questions when you bring your animal to the clinic for an examination? Let's say you've brought your tortoise LuLu in for her first veterinary examination because she has recently come out of hibernation and she's just not eating as well as she did last year at this time. Since this is our first visit together, I'll need as much information as possible about LuLu's background. Do we know how old LuLu is? How long have you been her caretaker? Where did you obtain LuLu? Are we certain that LuLu is not a Lewis? (We'll check that out on physical exam.) Where is LuLu housed, does she have an outdoor burrow? What type of plants are growing in her yard area, are they native desert plants? Ohhh, you sometimes keep her indoors? Why? What do you feed her? How often do you feed her? Does she eat what you feed her? What is her activity level? Have you noticed any nasal discharge? Do you know how often she defecates? How do her feces look? When did she come out of hibernation? Are there other tortoises in your care? Has she had any previous illnesses? Has she been seen previously by a veterinarian, and if so, has she ever had any health screen diagnostic tests performed or any surgeries? Do you have other pets?

These questions are examples of the "history" portion of the examination. Since LuLu can't speak to us directly to let us know how she's feeling, we rely on you, her caretaker, to provide our answers. Owners who are very observant about their animal can provide an invaluable amount of information to us. This information along with the information obtained from the physical examination will give us valuable clues as to what LuLu's problem might be. While I'm asking these questions, I'm also watching LuLu wander around the exam room. I may notice that she takes only a few steps and then stops and closes her eyes, and that she is not very curious about her new surroundings, and that her legs appear somewhat thin.

Now it's time to give LuLu a complete examination. We'll leave that discussion for our next column! See you then!

Thirsty

By Aaron Low

The smell of damp earth
and creosote after rain
in the desert
is something I will always know.

It draws attention to the thin margin
between the continuation of life
and simple survival.

During a brief rain
the desert tortoise
awakens from summer aestivation,
crawls out of its burrow
beneath the brittle stems of a creosote bush
looking for water
in the land depression it made months earlier.

It waits,
only to have the monsoon clouds
disappear, exposing the land
again to blind summer winds
and the hot reptile sun
without leaving enough water
for a drink.

Drowned but Still Alive

By Mark Martin

In the fourth season in my backyard, my friend Shelleye was renamed Shelldon. I had found Shelldon floating and hanging on to a lily leaf in my small fish pond when he was a few months out of the egg. This tiny 1.5-inch tortoise was perhaps the cutest living thing I had ever seen. To this day I have no idea how a desert tortoise ended up in my fish pond.

Shelldon has his very own garden planted with all his favorite foods: dandelions, clover, azaleas, and so on. He is served up broccoli and MegaDiet every day and had, until last October, full run of my large backyard. I have a swimming pool, but in seven seasons Shelldon had never ventured near either the pool or the pond.

Last October I was unable to find my tortoise at the usual feeding time. As I walked by my pool, I stared in disbelief at my tortoise on the bottom in the deep end. I instantly jumped in and hauled out my little friend. I have never seen anything so drowned and dead before. His color had changed and his eyes were closed and bulging out. How long had he been underwater? Was he alive? I became angry with myself for having him in a yard with water hazards.

Through my tears, while still in the pool, I began to shake him – tail up, face down. Lots of water came out his mouth. I shook him for a few minutes to no avail. I gave up and set him down. When I went in the house to change my clothes, my wife moved the tortoise. I told her to leave him alone, that he was dead. My wife responded through her tears that he was still alive. I ran over opened his mouth and began shaking him upside down again for a few

minutes. Lots more water came out. When I tipped him straight up, I heard his lungs fill with air. I gently shook him upside down again and blew in his nose when I tipped him up. Again his lungs filled with air, and this time he flinched and swallowed. He was alive! I put him in a box with towels and lights to warm him up. He vomited and peed water for the next several hours and his eyes retracted back into his head.

Information Sheet #25 on the Tortoise Group website gives details on how to treat tortoises that appear to have drowned. I hope that people with water features in their yards will read the sheet and know not to give up even if their tortoise looks really dead. I now have short fences around the water hazards and I am looking forward to my friend's emerging from his burrow soon.



Shelldon, happy to be alive

Share Your Stories and Ideas

Do you have a story to share with our readers? Please email stories, care tips, and other ideas of interest to our readers to kutiger@earthlink.net.

Question Corner (continued)

By **Laurey Ray**, a consultant on the Sulcata, the African Spurred tortoise

Q. Should I let my sulcata tortoise share the yard with my desert tortoise?

A. Although the climate needs of the sulcata and native desert tortoises are similar, the fact that these two tortoises naturally come from different continents can be of concern if they are housed together. Add to that the size difference between an adult sulcata and a desert tortoise, and I think housing them together may spell disaster.

I still stick by the rule of “no crossing continents.” The natural gut flora of our desert tortoise may, in fact, be different from that of an African sulcata. Housing the two together can cause one or both to become ill.

I also have a rule about housing like-sized animals together. The sulcata, by nature, is a rugged, bulldozing beast. It is aggressive and single-minded. That is not to say it is to be feared by humans, but when a sulcata sets its mind to something, nothing - not even small trees, fences, or a resting desert tortoise will stand in its way.

In my opinion, it would be best for both animals to be housed with only similarly sized animals of their own kind. I house deserts with deserts and sulcatas with sulcatas.

Free!
Yard Consultations
and Tortoise Adoptions
Call 739-8043

Tortoise Group Membership Form

All or part of memberships and contributions should be tax deductible

Name _____	Phone _____		Individual	15.00	_____
			Family	25.00	_____
Address _____			Sustaining	35.00	_____
			Sponsor	50.00	_____
City _____	State _____	Zip Code _____	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
- Renewing member New member

2006 Special Contribution _____

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**

Don't Wait Any Longer to Tag Your Tortoises

Check out Information Sheet # 5 on our website, www.tortoisegroup.org . You can affix the tag yourself. Or, call Betty, (702)739-8043 and arrange a time to take your tortoise to her for tagging and a microchip if you wish. Learn the tricks to tagging and then you can do your other tortoises. To insert the microchip there is a \$10.00 charge.

Not Just the Tortoise

The Clark County Multiple Species Habitat Conservation Program (MSHCP) or Desert Conservation Program, for short, does as the title suggests. It involves more than the Mojave Desert Tortoise. If you want to see the other 77 species of concern, the *Species Account Manual* (SAM) is available on the Mojave Max website. There is a color photo and a short description of each species. Here is the pathway: www.mojavemax.com. Click on *Mojave Max*, and then click on *Species Account Manual*.

New Board Support for Tortoise Group

The 19 members of Tortoise Group's new Honorary Advisory Board add another level expertise and support to desert tortoise conservation. The members are: Dr. Donald Baepler, Nev. State Senator Barbara Cegavske, Nev. State Senator Bob Coffin, Thalia Dondero, No. Las Vegas Councilman Robert Eliason, Dr. Norma Engberg, Mayor Robert Ferraro, Jim Gans, Janis Gerrits, Mayor Oscar Goodman, Alex Heindl, Dr. Christine Kolmstetter, Charles LaBar, Dr. Susan Meyer, Dr. Wesley Niles, Darlene Pond, Clark Co. Manager Thomm Reilly, Nev. State Senator Dina Titus, Assemblywoman Valerie Weber.

New Satellite Seller

In the area of Camino al Norte & W. Ann Rd
Greg – 649-1630

If you know the city, you can see that many areas need MegaDiet sellers. Second MegaDiet sellers in areas are also welcome. Do consider volunteering for this very rewarding way to spread diet and care information about tortoises. Please call Betty at 739-8043.



Caesar surveys his kingdom

Tortoise Care Tips

Plant Dandelions. Find a friend or business with unwanted dandelions that are not treated with herbicide or pesticide. See our Information Sheet #13 *Transplanting Dandelions* on our website www.tortoisegroup.org or send a self-addressed-stamped envelope to Tortoise Group.

Burrows for Babies – Tiles for hatchlings and small juveniles. The perfect fit of the Rounded Rake Roof Tiles is just right for the snugness needed by hatchlings. The tiles are only \$2.50 each from Tortoise Group. Call Betty if you cannot find them in a roofing supply yard. They take only a few minutes to install. See Information Sheet #14 on our website.

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 (S. California)
www.tortoise.com
Desert Tortoise Preserve Committee (California)
www.tortoise-tracks.org
Clark County School District Education Website
www.ccsd.net
Mojave Max Education www.mojavemax.com

Tortoise Group
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The Tortoise Group newsletter is
published three times yearly:
March, May, and August

Calendar for 2006

March 11

Refreshing Your Habitat
& Volunteer Reception

April 8

Environmentally Friendly Pest Control
& Tortoise Group Information Booth

April 22

Summerlin Earthfaire 2006

April 23

Backyard Habitat Tour in Green Valley

May 7

Field Trip to the Desert Tortoise
Conservation Center (DTCC)

May 20

A Veterinarian Talks about Tortoise Care

June 17

How a Tortoise Works – Habitat Needs
and Reproduction

July 15

Tortoise Workshop for Kids – Creatures
& Crafts

August 19

How a Tortoise Works – Hatchlings
to Hibernation

September 16

Photo Contest, Annual Meeting, and
Ice Cream Social

Please refer to page 3 for details of the spring programs

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