

# Tortoise Group Newsletter

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

Volume XIX No. 4 September 2006

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

Las Vegas, Nevada

## Cactus Cate Takes Center Stage

A large female desert tortoise named Cactus Cate has moved into her brand new habitat at the Clark County Government Center. Cate has not been coming out very much lately, just like the tortoises in our yards. Some have been out of sight for weeks. Access to the new habitat is easy. It's on the southeast side of the pyramid against the building.



Cactus Cate in her Government Center habitat

Cate's official caregivers are Tortoise Group members Debbie Forbush and Jerry Shupe. The habitat has turned out to be yet another venue where education about tortoises goes on. The caregivers have the opportunity to talk about tortoises with County employees who come outside to eat or smoke and visitors who stop by. It has been a great opportunity to answer questions about tortoises.

**2005 Photo Contest  
Winners in This Issue!**

## Photo Contest at September Meeting

Are you snapping those darling, comical, colorful, unusual pictures of your tortoises? If not, start now to literally cash in on the 3<sup>rd</sup> Annual Photo Contest to be held at the September meeting. Categories are Tortoises Alone, Tortoises with Other Animals, Tortoises with People, and a new category for Non-Native Tortoises. Captions are encouraged. Collect your best entry for each category and have them ready to submit after September 1 or at the meeting. Complete rules can be found on page 4. Be sure to look at last year's winners throughout this issue.

## Advertising Committee Has a Vision ...

- Pet tortoises are well cared for, housed, and fed.
  - Yards are prepared properly in advance.
- With this lofty goal, an advertising plan is developing. Join us for some brainstorming. Please call Laura Deitsch at 328-6151 for details.

## Workshop for Kids a Winner

Children and parents learned lots about tortoises, the desert and other reptiles at July's workshop. Baby tortoises were a huge hit, as always. Children used their fabulous imaginations to decorate sun visors with tortoise and desert themes.



Jerry Shupe shows a juvenile tortoise during the Workshop for Children in July, by Wende Lestelle

## MegaDiet Corner

### Comments from MegaDiet Users

More and more of my MegaDiet customers are telling me that their tortoises love MegaDiet.

“Thanks for the tip on apple sauce. I tried for four years to get my tortoise to eat MegaDiet. With the apple sauce he learned to scarf it right up!”

“My tortoises took to MegaDiet right away. You’d better give me another bag, because they’re eating like little piggies!” by Kathy Utiger



Tortoise with People winner. “Kristina with Mojave Max,” by Bob Furtek

### Creative Tips on Introducing MegaDiet

- Soften with unsweetened apple sauce or liquefied lettuce
- Soften and roll up in a grape leaf, rose petal or other favorite leaf (not lettuce)
- Hollow out half a cherry tomato and fill with softened MegaDiet
- Soften to cookie dough consistency. Stud the surface thickly with rose petals or desert willow flowers.
- Go cold turkey. No muss, no fuss.
- Email tips to Kathy at [kutiger@earthlink.net](mailto:kutiger@earthlink.net)

## MegaDiet Satellite Sellers

Please call sellers for appointment

Nellis & Owens	Georgi – 459-1274
Camino al Norte & W. Ann Rd	Greg & Char – 649-1630
I-215 & Lone Mtn	Lynn – 655-5698
Summerlin, I-215 & Far Hills	Kathy & Pauline – 804-0472, 9am – 7pm
Rainbow & Alta	Sherri – 255-1357
Charleston & Rancho	<b>Seeking volunteer</b>
Tropicana & Maryland	Betty – 739-8043
Industrial & Blue Diamond	Carolyn – 876-0668, ext. 874
Green Valley, Eastern & Windmill	Ed & Pat – 269-7108
Henderson, Lake Mead & Warm Springs	Laurie – 558-6985 (after 11:00 am)
Henderson, Boulder Hwy & Equestrian	Gail – 564-0031
Boulder City, Utah & Adams	Patty – 293-7263
Pahrump	Sheri – 775-727-5557
Kingman, AZ	Toni – 928-757-8317
Mail 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**

**New satellite seller in Kingman!**

## **Seasonal Reminders**

Some of you could not make it to the wonderful August presentation by Betty Burge about Hatchlings and Hibernation (Brumation), so here are some bits of information you missed. Although tortoise mothers typically walk away from the nest immediately after laying the eggs, some stay a while and may try to deter a curious biologist by charging. In Gila Monster areas, the female may do the same against this natural egg-eater.

If you find your hatchling has a piece of shell stuck to its face, you will need to remove it carefully. Moisten a cotton-tipped applicator with warm water and press it around the edges of the stuck shell. The water should soften the dried albumin (egg white) that is acting like glue, allowing you to lift the egg shell. Several attempts may be necessary. Don't rush this, because the dried albumin acts like Crazy Glue and you can injure the skin if you pull too soon.

Give that all-important soak in a basin of slightly warm water before your tortoises disappear for the last time in the fall. Do it again in the spring. Tortoises seem to be able to take in water from their

vent, the rear opening, so even if the tortoise does not drink let it soak as long as it will tolerate the basin. Stay close by. My tortoise settles down in the water for 10 or even 15 minutes sometimes. Then all of a sudden he lets me know he's had enough by trying to climb out.

Hatchlings tend to dehydrate during the winter if you must remove them from their burrows to sleep in a box. Place the box in a cold place (35 to 50 degrees F) where they will be dry and where you can watch them. To prevent dehydration, keep a jar lid of water in the corner of the big box and provide little boxes, cut like burrows, for the babies to snug into. Keep the big box cover loose or lay a towel over most of the top. To allow traction for any active babies, use packed yard soil in the bottom, not slick newspaper or wood chips. Toweling is dangerous because the long sharp nails of the young can become caught. If you use an aquarium, cover the sides with brown paper or place the aquarium in a carton just a little larger than the aquarium. Any active tortoises will try to go through the glass if it can see the world beyond it. This is frustrating. Prevent this stress.



**Best in Shell winner. "Quality Time" with Tiffany and friends,  
by Jean and Norm Maul**

# All-You-Can-Eat Ice Cream Social

Date: Saturday, Sept 16

Time: 1:00 pm

Place: Nevada State  
Museum  
and Historical  
Society  
in Lorenzi Park

## Desert Tortoises on Parade

### A photo contest & Ice Cream Social

Our desert tortoises have been awake all summer displaying their mischievous and loving personalities with us humans who share their world.

Now is the time to catch the antics of your desert tortoise in photographs and enter your pet in "Desert Tortoises on Parade."

Judges will present:

### Best-In-Shell Prizes

\$50 - Overall winner

\$25 - Each category

**Ribbons** for Funniest, Most Outlandish, Most Mischievous, and More

Tortoise photos will be judged in four categories; captions are optional (but they're a lot of fun)

1. Tortoise(s) Alone
2. Tortoise(s) with Other Animal(s)
3. Tortoise(s) with People
4. Non-Native Tortoise(s) *... New Category ...*

### Rules

- Maximum one entry per person/category
- All entries must be submitted by 1:15 pm on September 16 or received by Tortoise Group in the mail by September 15
- Photographs only; do not bring your tortoise to the contest
- **All photographs become the property of Tortoise Group**
- Winners need not be present

### Photographs

- Maximum size 8" x 10", black & white or color, glossy or matte
- Mounted on cardboard or in frame with margins no wider than one (1) inch.
- Caption (optional) may be written on bottom margin
- Information written on back: Category; Tortoise's Name, Shell Size, Sex; Photographer's Name, Address, and Phone Number; Owner's Name (if different from Photographer's)

**Winning Photos will be placed on the Website**

**Banana Splits  
Whipped Cream  
& Tortoises !!**

## **Dr. K's Kolumn**

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

As you remember from our previous visits, LuLu the desert tortoise had been hospitalized. Her x-rays revealed that she was eggbound, and that she had a very large bladder stone. Her initial bloodwork also indicated a few additional problems. After several days of hospitalization and supportive care, her recheck bloodwork was much improved, and her surgery for spay and bladder stone removal was scheduled.

On the day of surgery, LuLu was given injections of medications for pain control and for sedative effects, and she was initially anesthetized with an intravenous anesthetic administered into her tail vein. This resulted in enough muscle relaxation to allow her mouth to be easily opened for placement of a breathing tube into her trachea. An inhalant anesthetic with oxygen was then administered through this tube. Once anesthetized, all reptiles tend to stop breathing on their own and, therefore, must be ventilated continuously during an anesthesia and surgical procedure. This is necessary in order to maintain good oxygen levels for the reptile and to provide adequate anesthesia, which prevents the reptile from waking up during the procedure!

Once LuLu was anesthetized, an intravenous catheter was placed into her jugular vein. An extension line and syringe containing fluids were attached to the end of the catheter, and the syringe was placed on a small syringe pump. This pump allows for intravenous fluids to be given at a constant rate during the surgical procedure. Equipment for monitoring heart and respiratory rates was attached to LuLu.

In order to remove a uterus full of eggs as well as a large stone from the bladder in a tortoise, access to the body cavity is achieved by drilling an appropriately sized hole into the bottom portion of the shell, or plastron. So, LuLu was gently placed upside down so that her plastron could be thoroughly cleaned and prepared for drilling. Since the lungs in tortoises are attached to the upper part of the body cavity, being placed in an upside down position makes breathing very difficult, especially when the excess weight of eggs and a large bladder stone put additional pressure on lung tissue. This is another reason why assisted respiration is critical for these animals during anesthesia.

Using a drill with a cutting wheel, a square hole was drilled into the plastron. The size of the hole is determined by measuring the size of the bladder stone from the x-ray image. If the hole in the shell is drilled too small, the rock-hard bladder stone will not fit through the opening for removal. That would be a problem! Once the square of drilled shell is gently peeled up, the bladder and uterus and other body cavity organs are visible. Since LuLu's bladder stone was so large, the cystotomy (bladder stone removal procedure) was performed first. An incision was made into the bladder, the stone was removed, the bladder was flushed with sterile fluids to remove additional small debris, and the bladder was then sutured closed.

Now that the bladder stone was removed, the ovaries as well as the uterus with its content of eggs were more easily accessible for the spay procedure. The appropriate sutures were placed to minimize any bleeding, and then the ovaries, uterus and eggs were removed. The remaining organs were gently examined for abnormalities, and the square of shell was then replaced to close the body cavity. In order to provide a complete seal, an acrylic paste which hardens several minutes after application was placed around the edges of the square.

Finally, the spay and bladder stone removal procedures have been completed! LuLu is monitored closely as she is waking up, and she is given additional pain medications as needed. By later in the day, she is becoming more active. LuLu is hospitalized for several more days, and antibiotics, fluids and pain medications are continued as needed. Although her appetite is not quite back to normal when she goes home, she definitely seems to be feeling better, and her caretakers will continue with some medications at home.

Since LuLu is now spayed, egg production and egg binding will never be a problem for her again!! Unfortunately, however, bladder stones can recur, especially if the diet is inappropriate or if LuLu is not given adequate access to drinking water and water for soaking. Therefore, her caretakers are being extra careful in providing her an appropriate outdoor environment. LuLu will have recheck x-rays taken periodically to monitor for any possible recurrence of problems.

## Question Corner

Betty Burge, who receives many phone inquiries each day, reports that the most frequent question this month has been, "Where can I get MegaDiet?" Almost half of the calls come from California and Arizona. Betty is delighted that not only are more and more tortoises receiving MegaDiet but that tortoise owners out of state have found our website and the information on food and feeding.

**Q.** What do I do with my Sulcata, the African Spurred tortoise? He is too big for my yard and is more than I can manage.

**A.** We have a few contacts in Las Vegas who can help place the tortoise. However, the problem continues that too many people are not ready for this giant, and they have no warm place to keep it over the winter and give it the room it needs. Sooner or later they have to give up the tortoise. Sulcatas do not hibernate and are the largest tortoise after the Galapagos and the Aldabra tortoises. Please think at least twice before you acquire one.

**Q.** I have some hatchlings and they all seem to be females. The underside of each shell is flat. Also, my friend told me that I have to wait for 15 years for the tortoise to breed.

**A.** The underside, or plastron, of all hatchlings is flat and remains flat until the tortoise is about 7 inches in shell length. Then the males have the beginnings of a graceful concavity as the plastron nears the tail. By the time the tortoise is 8 inches in shell length, it may be ready to breed. The time it takes to reach this size varies. Growth is a matter of how well the tortoise is fed, not time. In captivity, the tortoise may be ready to breed in six years.

**Q.** I bought a Russian tortoise from a pet shop and was told to feed it just cantaloupe. Along with the tortoise I was sold an aquarium and a special light. I have the feeling that the information on care is not right, and the tortoise tries to get out of the aquarium all day.

**A.** You are correct. The information and equipment you have for this tortoise are not right.

The Russian or Steppe tortoise, like other tortoises, should live outside and have plenty of room. It is hardy, and if you dig a burrow for it the tortoise will be fine year round, sleeping in the burrow over the winter. You can give it MegaDiet and growing plants much like our desert tortoise. Tortoise Group has information sheets on their care. Just call us at 739-8043. Also, the Tortoise Group pamphlet, *Desert Tortoises, Adoption and Care* will give you a lot of useful information.



**Tortoise Alone winner. "Any Girls Out There?" with Tad, by Kathy Utiger**

## Planning for Next Spring

Tortoise Group committees are already working toward the next season. To reach our goals, we need fresh insight and energy. Please join us in improving the lives of tortoises. Call Betty for details and to get involved – 739-8043.

- Advertising Committee Members
- Membership Chairman
- Yard Consulting Crew

### Websites of Interest

Desert Tortoise Council [www.deserttortoise.org](http://www.deserttortoise.org)  
California Turtle and Tortoise Club [www.tortoise.org](http://www.tortoise.org)  
Tortoise Trust (United Kingdom and the USA) [www.tortoisetrust.org](http://www.tortoisetrust.org)  
American Tortoise Rescue (S. California) [www.tortoise.com](http://www.tortoise.com)  
Desert Tortoise Preserve Committee (California) [www.tortoise-tracks.org](http://www.tortoise-tracks.org)  
Clark County School District Education Website [www.ccsd.net](http://www.ccsd.net)  
Mojave Max Education [www.mojavemax.com](http://www.mojavemax.com)

**Annual Meeting and Election of Officers**

Members will have an opportunity to bring forth ideas and issues and to consider a proposed addition to the bylaws concerning the new Honorary Advisory Board. The Nomination Committee presents Betty Burge for Chairman, Kathy Utiger for Vice-Chairman, Pauline Kuntz for Secretary (new nomination) and Trilla Newton for Treasurer. Further nominations will be accepted from the floor. The Photo Contest, Silent Auction and Ice Cream Social will follow the brief meeting. Betty has copies of the proposed bylaws amendment, 739-8043.



**Tortoise with Other Animals winner. "On your marks, get ready, get set, GO!!!" with Onyx the cat and Harrison the tortoise, by Maureen O'Sullivan**

**Revised Adoption and Care Pamphlet Now Available**

The June 2006 edition of our Care Pamphlet is ready for you. Check it out on the website or pick up your free copy at any vet or public library in Clark County. Also, the pamphlet is a thoughtful idea for any friend or acquaintance that has a tortoise and needs some help with care.

**Urgent Plea**  
Send us your new email address

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**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 _____	Sustaining 35.00 _____
	Zip Code _____	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

**2006 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**

**Life Membership increases to \$500 in 2007**

**Tortoise Group**  
**5157 Poncho Circle**  
**Las Vegas, NV 89119**  
**702-739-8043**

**Editor** Kathy Utiger

**Board of Directors**

**Officers**

Chairman Betty Burge  
Vice-Chairman Kathy Utiger  
Secretary Maureen O'Sullivan  
Treasurer Trilla Newton

**Members**

Laura Deitsch, Toni Hoyes,  
Pauline Kuntz, Wende Lestelle,  
Susan Stater

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

**Calendar for 2006**

**September 2** – Harvest Festival, 10 am – 3 pm  
Red Rock Canyon Visitor's Center  
Environmental exhibits  
Visit the Tortoise Group booth

**September 16** – last TG meeting of the year

Photo Contest  
Silent Auction  
Annual Meeting  
Ice Cream Social

**Please refer to page 4 for meeting times and  
complete rules of the photo contest**

Material submitted to the Tortoise Group  
Newsletter becomes the property of Tortoise  
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