

# Tortoise Group Newsletter

Hotline: 702-739-7113

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

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

Las Vegas, Nevada

## **T-Rex Is Alive! May 4, 2011**

**By Bonnie Alvarez**

T-Rex came out twice in early spring—the last day we saw him was March 29. Then he disappeared. We thought for sure that he was dead, except there was no odor or trail of ants. My biggest fear was that a bird of prey might have carried him off, but that he's pretty big and I think I've seen just one bird of prey. Worry, worry.

We followed Tortoise Group's advice to reflect sunlight down the burrow with a mirror, and even to carefully slide a PVC pipe into his burrow and every few inches stop to listen for movement or an exhalation of breath. Maybe we would peak his curiosity by stirring around in the burrow. Nothing. Day after day we worried. We scheduled a Snooper visit for next Saturday. Then today we had the first 90-degree weather. And there he was, just walking around sniffing at the new plants in his habitat like nothing had ever happened—and it hadn't! I am marking this day on my calendar so I'll know when to expect him next year.



**My tortoise Murphy and my granddaughter Olivia. We live in Pahrump. Murphy has been part of our family for 6 years now!! Photo by Joann Biesemeyer**



**Tortoise emerges from his burrow at the Desert Tortoise Conservation Center during the Tortoise Group tour. Photo by JoAnn Cohen**

## **Tortoise Group Reauthorized To Adopt Desert Tortoises**

As of May 2, the US Fish and Wildlife Service will issue a letter of authorization to Tortoise Group to continue as its adoption entity. This decision followed a review of Tortoise Group's standards and procedures, and inclusion of a few newly instituted requirements.

As we now know, adoption through Tortoise Group is the only legal way to become a tortoise custodian. Until recently, we did not realize that it is not legal to give a tortoise to another person. Tortoises belong to the people of the State of Nevada. Tortoises available for adoption are cared for at the Desert Tortoise Conservation Center.

## MegaDiet Corner

The Tortoise Group website offers an amazing amount of information on offering MegaDiet. Check out some of these topics and many more at <http://www.tortoisegroup.org/megadiet.php>

- Converting a Tortoise from Vegetables to MegaDiet
- What If My Tortoise Won't Eat MegaDiet?
- When Do I Feed My Tortoise?
- Should I Add Vitamins?

No Internet? Send a SASE to the Tortoise Group address listed on page 8 with the items requested.

## MegaDiet Prices Slashed!

We took the challenge: how can we get MegaDiet to more tortoises in this tough economy? The answer - lower the price! By buying in large quantity, we are thrilled to be able to pass along the savings to tortoise custodians nationwide. Here's the new price structure:

### Members      NonMembers

#### Price/1 ½ lb Bag

\$6.00      \$10.00

#### Price reduction

25%      20%

#### Price/20# Sac

\$70.00      \$100.00

#### Savings over per-bag price

\$9.80      \$33.00 **WOW!**

## MegaDiet Tip

Be sure to offer your tortoise plenty of greens to accompany the MegaDiet. Make plants available at browsing height so your tortoise can eat when IT wants to while you are away.

## Have You or Your email Address Moved?

Please remember to send your new physical and email addresses to [gnbowler78@hotmail.com](mailto:gnbowler78@hotmail.com)

## MegaDiet Satellite Sellers

Please call sellers for appointment

Nellis & Owens	Georgi – 459 - 1274
Decatur & Gowan	Toni – 277-6179
Cheyenne & Durango	Susann – 205 -7576
215 & Far Hills	Kathy & Pauline 804-0472, 9am – 7pm
Rainbow & Alta	Kellie –243-7597
Charleston & Casino Center (new)	Trilla at Ace Locksmiths: 382-1754
215 & W Tropicana	Athena – 682-0307
215 & S. Decatur	Carolyn – 534-7888 x824 378-6514 cell
Eastern & Windmill	Patsy – 269-7108 cell
215 & S. Eastern	Helene – 878-7877 w 375-7998 cell
Boulder Hwy & Equestrian	Gail – 334-0015 Cell
Warm Springs & Lake Mead	Gay – 563-1924
Boulder City (new)	Carol – 293-6494
Pahrump	Sheri –775-727-5557
Kingman, AZ	Toni – 928-757-8317

OnLine Store at:

<http://www.tortoisegroup.org/sales/intoshop.php>

No computer? Call Susan – 702-458-8382

A 1½ lb bag costing a member \$6.00 lasts a large desert tortoise about one month. MegaDiet is also sold at Tortoise Group meetings.

**40% discount to TG members**

### Seeking Satellite Sellers

- NW Las Vegas
- East & Southwest Las Vegas

Contact Kathy at 804-0472 or

[KathyUtiger@tortoisegroup.org](mailto:KathyUtiger@tortoisegroup.org)

## What Plants Should I Buy for My Tortoise Habitat? By Betty Burge

Before you go to buy plants, check Tortoise Group's Information Sheet #21 *Plants to Grow for Tortoises*

[www.tortoisegroup.org/infosheets/infosheet21.php](http://www.tortoisegroup.org/infosheets/infosheet21.php).

Tortoises eat these plants and most are an attractive addition to your yard.

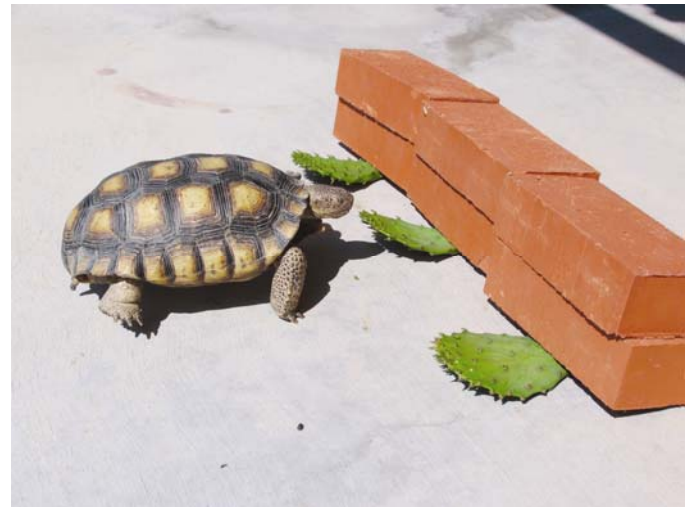
Next, you are standing in the plant nursery wondering about poisonous plants. There is a short list at the bottom of the Sheet #21. We have not added any names to that list for many years. This suggests that **tortoises avoid plants that are harmful to them**. There are gradations of that, because tortoise custodians tell us about their tortoises eating tomato plants (not good) and even Oleander. In some yards the choices are very limited. A tortoise may be forced to eat plants of low nutritional value because that is what's available. Look for places that sell native desert plants, which we have noted on Sheet #21. Unfortunately relatively few native plants are available or last the entire season.

What is poisonous? Keep in mind that not all parts of a plant are the same as far as being poisonous or not. Once upon a time the red fruit of the tomato was considered as poisonous as the plant. We finally learned otherwise. We suggest that you confine the entire tomato plant behind a barrier to your tortoises. Tomato fruit is not important nutritionally for tortoises, anyway. To show a point, we heartily enjoy the potato, the underground storage stem. However, the numerous little buds that emerge from the potato turn green in the light and eventually sprout to create the aboveground plant that is poisonous. So that is why some of us remove those "eyes" before they become green.

These are members of the Nightshade family but so is the Petunia and tortoises like to eat Petunias. Maybe Petunias would be lower on a list of tortoise's preferences if more preferred plants were available, or perhaps the amount of toxic substance in Petunias is low.

Another fact is that certain plant parts that are poisonous to us are harmless to other animals. They learn what is safe by different means, parents being one of them. The Black Bear cub smells the breath of the parent having just eaten certain plants. What about tortoises who receive no parental care? I do not know what they use. They may have to take a non-fatal nibble, or the odor of the leaf or flower may be the cue. If you watch you may see your tortoise sniffing plants before taking that first bite.

Cacti with spines are a challenge. I have found a spine stuck in the flesh near the mouth. Lack of food or water may force tortoises to eat cacti with spines. Tortoises will climb into a low cactus like Pencil Cholla, *Opuntia ramosissima*, to eat the flowers and the stem tips of new growth that is spineless. Offering your tortoise the nutritious and spineless variety of cactus, *Opuntia ficus-indica*, is the cactus of choice. In addition, the tiny glochids numerous in the nodes that cover the flat pads of this cacti do not seem to cause a problem in tortoises. There is no need to scrape them off.



**Cactus Bar: Young spineless cactus pads weighted with bricks and propped up with small pebbles are a tasty treat.**  
Photo by Betty Burge

If the plant you want to buy is not on our list, buy one and see. Tortoises are individual in their tastes. Only one of my tortoises eats Gazanias, an African Daisy, but they all love our native Desert Willow flowers.



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

April 16, 2011

### Experiencing the DTCC

by Lauren Kilpatrick, Age 16

Often the most unique animals are the ones that are the quietest and move the slowest. Many people don't know how interesting it is to learn about the Desert Tortoises and the way they live. The Desert Tortoise Conservation Center is a great place to learn more about these fascinating little creatures.

My mom and I have been Desert Tortoise custodians for about nine years and we have grown pretty fond of our little Huka (a boy). A few weeks ago, we signed up for a tour of the DTCC with a group of other Tortoise Group members to learn a little more about our state's keystone reptile.



**Lori Scott, DTCC Research Associate, demonstrates protective cover on hatchling pen. Photo by K. Utiger**

The DTCC is managed by the San Diego Zoo here in Las Vegas and the Nevada Department of Wildlife. The people at the DTCC were very friendly and could answer any questions we asked. We toured the main building and got a lot of history and education about the efforts to preserve the Desert Tortoise and its importance to our Nevada ecosystem.



**Tortoise basks in the April noon sun at the Desert Tortoise Conservation Center Photo by JoAnn Cohen**

My favorite part of the trip was seeing all the tortoises. The tiny, six-month-old hatchlings were adorable. We even saw a tortoise that was about 60 years old! The habitats were carefully put together and you could see how much work the staff puts into caring for the tortoises.

By visiting the DTCC, I learned that there is a lot more to a Desert Tortoise than burrowing and a shell. A Desert Tortoise is extremely important to its habitat and they are a species that is threatened every day. Also, one should think very seriously about keeping one as a pet. I am glad that people are out there spreading awareness about the Desert Tortoise and are doing things to care for them and to increase their population. I recommend a tour of the DTCC as an amazing learning experience!

### Reunion with Sammy at the DTCC

By Bob and Kathy Adie

In December, 2004 Sammy came to live at our house. She was such a cute, tiny thing. We babied that tortoise and enjoyed watching her grow and thrive. Her personality quickly won our hearts as she roamed all over exploring her new home. She

made us smile every day and we looked forward to the future with her in our lives. Then the recession hit and our fortunes changed. We could not continue to set up our yard to meet the needs of our growing girl and, therefore, we could no longer continue as Sammy's custodians. We could not deny our Sammy the life that a desert tortoise deserves so, although it broke our hearts, we did what was best for her. We followed the law and surrendered her to the Desert Tortoise Conservation Center (DTCC). On July 31, 2009, a very kind young man from the Pet Desert Tortoise Hotline came to our home and took Sammy to the DTCC.

We always wondered how our Sammy was doing. So when we heard about this year's Tortoise Group's tour to the DTCC, I asked if it might be possible to see Sammy during the tour. They told me that if she was out they would bring her in from the field as a very special favor. Sammy was out and as you can see from the look on my face, I was thrilled to see her looking so happy and healthy.



**Tour members peek in the veterinary building.  
Foreground: Plastic totes for transporting tortoises  
dry in the sun** Photos by Kathy Utiger

You may ask why I am wearing a yellow smock. The DTCC is extremely careful about biosecurity. No germs from other people's tortoises or outside the area are permitted to contact tortoises like Sammy who have gone through quarantine. Sammy had a smile on her face and I had a tear in my eye, as she was admired by the folks on the tour. Now I

can rest assured that she has a good life ahead. My thanks to Kathy Utiger at Tortoise Group and Lori Scott at the DTCC for their help in making this very special day for my wife (who saw the pictures of our beautiful girl) and for me.



**Bob Adie strokes Sammy's shell during a special reunion at the Desert Tortoise Conservation Center. Bob and Kathy surrendered Sammy two years ago when they moved out of their home.**

### **Unwanted Tortoises: What Do I Do?**

Call the Pet Desert Tortoise Pickup Hotline at 488-9422. No repercussions, no unwanted questions.

You may surrender your tortoise(s) to the Desert Tortoise Conservation Center for any reason:

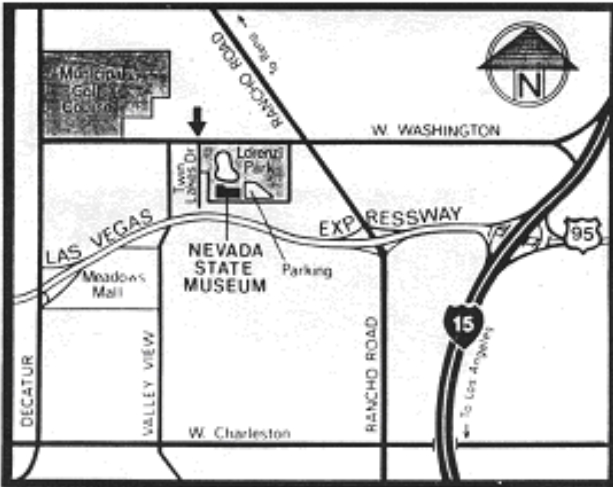
- Breeding pair---need to give up one tortoise
- Unwanted hatchlings or others
- Moving out of state
- Fighting tortoises
- Moving from home
- Custodian can no longer take care of tortoise



## Spring Events

**1 - 3 pm**

**Nevada State Museum in Lorenzi Park  
700 Twin Lakes Drive, Las Vegas 89107**



**MegaDiet and other tortoise items will be for sale**  
Please call Kathy with questions, 702-804-0472

**May 21**

**Common Hidden Health Problems that  
Your Tortoise May Not Tell You About:  
Why the Annual Exam Is So Important**  
**By Dr. Christine Kolmstetter, DVM**

A health exam can lead to the discovery of hidden health problems in tortoises such as bladder stones, retained eggs, anemia, intestinal foreign bodies, and so on. Have you ever wondered:

- How the vet takes blood samples from tortoises, or x-rays?
- How they perform anesthesia and surgical procedures?
- Why some of these procedures can be much more difficult in a tortoise than in a dog or cat?

After veterinary school, Dr Kolmstetter completed 3 years of internship and residency training in Avian, Exotic Animal and Zoo Animal Medicine and Surgery, and she has worked extensively with a variety of reptiles, birds, rabbits, ferrets and other

‘non-traditional’ pets in addition to dogs and cats. She has been providing medical and surgical care for desert tortoises since she returned to Las Vegas in 1997. The list of additional degrees and specialized training is too long to include here. **This talk is a definite “must!”**

**June 11**

**Creating a Tortoise Habitat**  
**By Kathy Utiger**

- What makes your habitat safe and friendly for a tortoise?
- What should we watch out for?
- What plants do tortoises like best?

Kathy will show lots of photos of habitats to give you ideas and walk through the basics, especially safety. Also, she will talk about plants for tortoises and the use of fertilizers and pesticides. We’ll examine some intriguing ways to make many different plants available for browsing.



**Tad bites into a favorite red rose grown organically without any pesticides.**  
Photo by Kathy Utiger

**Mark Your Calendar Now**

Tortoise Group meets monthly, 1-3 pm at the Nevada State Museum and Historical Society. Upcoming meeting are:

- July 16
- August 13
- September 17

### When Is My Membership Due?

Tortoise Group sends a renewal notice by email about one month before your membership is due. If you haven't given us an email address, we send a letter. As a receipt for tax purposes, we send you a postcard (with a pretty tortoise picture) which shows the membership amount and the renewal date.

We have received two types of complaints:

- Many people have let us know that they did not receive a renewal reminder email. Sometimes it has gone to Spam or somewhere unknown. We do know that many of the emails were never opened. We are working to correct this situation.
- Checks were not processed within one month. Let me explain our process so you'll understand. At the end of each month, Satellite Sellers mails paperwork and checks to the Administrator who processes all the information and mails the

checks on to the Treasurer, who also does some processing and then deposits the checks. It could easily be 6 six before the cycle is completed if your check was dated near the beginning of the month. We ask that you have patience, as we are all volunteers. And if you ever have a question, please do contact us.



**Juvenile at the Desert Tortoise Conservation**

**Center saying "hi!"**

**Photo by JoAnn Cohen**

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### **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**

**2011**

- ☐ Send my newsletter by e-mail  
☐ Send my newsletter in hard copy

#### **3. Check amount for your 1-year membership**

( ) \$15 ( ) \$25 ( ) \$35 ( ) \$50 ( ) \$75 ( ) Life \$500

Special Contribution: \_\_\_\_\_

40% 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**

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

**Spring Calendar for 2011**

**May 21, 1-3 pm**

**Common Hidden Health Problems That Your Tortoise Might Not Tell You About: Why the Annual Exam Is So Important!**

by Dr Christine Kolmstetter, DVM

Learn about hidden health problems like bladder stones and retained eggs. Dr K explains anesthesia and surgery techniques on tortoises. And much, much more. Don't miss this special presentation!

**June 11, 1-3 pm**

**Creating a Tortoise Habitat**

by Kathy Utiger, MA

Kathy will show photos of habitats to give you ideas. Also, she will talk about plants for tortoises and the use of fertilizers and pesticides. We'll examine some intriguing ways to make many plants available for browsing.

Details on page 6

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

