

# Tortoise Group Newsletter

Hotline: 702-739-7113

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

Volume XXIV No. 3 July 2011

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

Las Vegas, Nevada

## Mark Your Tortoise Inside and Out: a July Workshop

Dr. Gary Weddle, DVM, longtime friend of Tortoise Group, will lead a workshop on marking tortoises. We will offer both a microchipping service and a workshop on applying the exterior marking. Dr. Weddle will present an overview of marking techniques, how they function, and why they are critically needed.

**Microchipping.** Bring your tortoise if you want to have it microchipped. The cost will be \$15.00. Put the tortoise in a box or carrier, and be sure to have the car adequately air conditioned before you begin the trip. It's sure to be a very hot day. **Call Kathy at 804-0472 to reserve a microchip.**

**Exterior Marking Workshop.** Two methods of identification are best. We will show you how to safely apply your phone number to the shell of the tortoise. You can watch or practice. Leave the tortoise at home. The Lost Tortoise Prevention Kit will be available for \$10.00, also online.



Shelly and Speedy enjoy their daily treat of blossoms from a desert willow tree *by Jeff and Andrea Meckley*

## Tortoise Facts

### Preferred Body Temperature

~86 – 93 degrees F

### Critical Thermal Maximum (see page 3)

~103 – 112 degrees F

### Sex determined by incubation temperatures (in degrees F)

88-91 females

87-88 both sexes

79-87 males

Below 79 results in high mortality

## Annual Letter Announces Change in Membership Renewal Policy

By now you have probably read our annual letter. Starting July 1, Tortoise Group is reverting to its policy of an annual membership, which will run January 1 – December 31 each year. All memberships (except Life) will expire on December 31, 2011 and be renewable on January 1, 2012.

Our current system relied heavily on notifying members of due dates by email. We now know that many people didn't see the emails for many different reasons. So, we're going back to the old system of mailing to you all at once. Bulk mail is the most cost-effective approach after email. We apologize for the many worries, and we appreciate your taking the time to let us know that the system was not a good one for Tortoise Group.

So far this year we have lost 100 of our 700 members due to this poor communication. We hope to see you back as members. **If you have not yet renewed your membership for 2011, we ask you to do so right away. Thank you.**

## MegaDiet Corner

The Tortoise Group website has 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?

## MegaDiet Testimonial

In response to your 6/12/11 email, we have been serving up MegaDiet using your method ever since reading about it in 7/07 TG newsletter. It was and still is the best idea we have seen/heard. I have passed it along to a few others, too. Thank you for all your help! Melissa

## New Lower MegaDiet Pricing

### Members      NonMembers

#### Price/1 ½ lb Bag

\$6.00              \$10.00 (add \$0.50 for online prices)

#### Price reduction

25%              20%

#### Price/20# Sac

\$70.00              \$100.00

#### Savings over per-bag price

\$9.80              \$33.00

**Where can I buy a 20# sac in Las Vegas?** Call Kathy at 215 & Far Hills, Toni at Decatur & Gowen, Trilla at Charleston & Casino Center, or Helene at 215 & S. Eastern. No online sales, sorry.

## MegaDiet Tip

Be sure to offer your tortoise plenty of greens (no lettuce) to accompany the MegaDiet and make several plants available at browsing height in the habitat so your tortoise can eat when IT wants to.

## MegaDiet Satellite Sellers

Please call sellers for appointment

Nellis & Owens	Georgi – 459 - 1274
Decatur & Gowen	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

- Would you like to sell MD for TG?

Contact Kathy at 804-0472 or  
[KathyUtiger@tortoisegroup.org](mailto:KathyUtiger@tortoisegroup.org)

## **What Changes in Behavior Should I Look for in the Summer? By Kathy Utiger**

In Las Vegas we had a beautiful, mild if unpredictable spring. However, now the weather has changed to hot, and along with that come changes in tortoise behavior: amount of time outside the burrow, sleeping location, eating habits.

### **Burrow Temperature and Sleep Habits**

As the summer progresses to its peak heat in August, the ground continues to heat up, too. Right now the ground is still relatively cool from the winter. It changes very slowly. The tortoise adapts its sleeping location depending on where the optimum temperature is to be found. In mid spring it may be warmer outside the burrow than inside, so the tortoise sleeps outside under a little cover. In mid summer, the tortoise may move out of the burrow to the outside where the temperature is cooler than in the burrow.

### **Summertime**

**Eating Habits** While in spring my tortoise was eating everything in the yard and lots of MegaDiet, in the hot summer, he eats like I do—not so much. When I put his MegaDiet in front of him sometimes he walks right through it or eats just a bite or two. And he changes his preferred plants each season.



**Salad bar allows tortoise to browse flowers and dandelions along patio edge. Note poisonous tomato plant is out of tortoise's reach in pot (left)**

**Burrow time**—On very hot days he may not come out of his burrow at all for several days at a time, but he does come out at night. By early morning he's back in the burrow. It seems like he's hunkered out waiting for the hot spell to pass. The amount of time a tortoise can remain outside in mid summer before he must seek the cool of the burrow may be as little as 1 ½ hours per day.

### **The Burrow Is Critical**

Due to repeated flooding of the burrows, lately several people have opted for aboveground burrows. This is an okay solution if constructed properly, see Information Sheet #10 [www.tortoisegroup.org/infosheets/infosheet10.php](http://www.tortoisegroup.org/infosheets/infosheet10.php). However, some people have used a kitty igloo, which is high, airy, and shallow with a high wide doorway, the opposite of a good tortoise burrow.

**A good burrow** is very snug, limiting air circulation and preserving heat, or coolness. It has at least two feet of dirt insulation all around. The tortoise can retreat many feet into the burrow. The summer sun does not blast the burrow opening in the morning, daytime, or evening.

**“Critical Thermal Maximum (~103-112 °F for a tortoise)** is that temperature above which most individuals respond with unorganized locomotion, subjecting the animal to likely death. This concept is particularly relevant in periods of [aestivation](#) or [quiescence](#), in which circumstances an organism experiences limited mobility and lacks the ability to seek a [microhabitat](#) of reduced thermal stress.”

**Test the burrow temperature.** On a hot August day, tape a thermometer onto a piece of PVC pipe or broomstick and slide it into the burrow for a temperature reading. Leave it for about 10 minutes, remove quickly and read. If the temperature is 102°F or 105°F, your tortoise is very hot. And there is no escape! — no area of “reduced thermal stress.” If you need ideas on how to improve your burrow, call us for a yard consultation 702-739-7113 or email [info@tortoisegroup.org](mailto:info@tortoisegroup.org). Help us improve quality of life for pet tortoises.



## Tad's Bladder Stone Surgery Update By Kathy Utiger

On June 21, Dr Christine Kolmstetter of Caring Hands Animal Hospital removed not one, but two bladder stones from Tad in an intensive, 3-hour surgery! The bladder was severely thickened from the stones bouncing for years, and Dr K worried that the bladder might not function. However, all is going well. After a few days in ICU at the clinic with pain meds and antibiotics, Tad came home.



Jasmin getting ready to anesthetize Tad



Exposed bladder showing hole where stones will be removed

To enable continuous healing, his body temperature must be kept at about 85°. We lined the bathroom floor with cardboard to protect it from urine and feces, and made a “burrow” from an upside down

box with a tortoise-sized opening. We have a full-spectrum light for daytime. To keep the temperature at 85° at floor level, we use a small electric heater. It's much hotter higher up in the room.



4 ounces of material from two 1 1/2-in bladder stones removed through Tad's left rear leg hole in a 3-hour surgery. Stones were painstakingly crunched into smaller sizes inside the bladder.



Tad is his ICU cage that is kept at 85°F for constant healing

*Photos by Jasmin*

He goes outside to browse morning and evening during the nice part of the day. He have a cement block in front of his burrow (he can move a rock or board). We have to keep him out of his burrow so that he can be sure to get his meds and stay warm inside. He uses his grape plant haven instead of the burrow and we bring him in when the temperature starts to get too warm. He's supposed to soak 30

minutes each day, but he immediately starts pawing at the sides of the kiddie pool we've borrowed for him. He says "no" to that soaking stuff. Dr K has given him several subcutaneous fluids instead.



**Tad's "burrow" in the bathroom. Floor is lined with cardboard. Floor level is kept at 85°F for healing.**

Dr Kolmstetter did not have to cut Tad's shell because she used the inguinal fossa approach, accessing the body cavity through the opening in front of the rear leg. He has a few stitches, flexes his leg occasionally, and walks just fine.



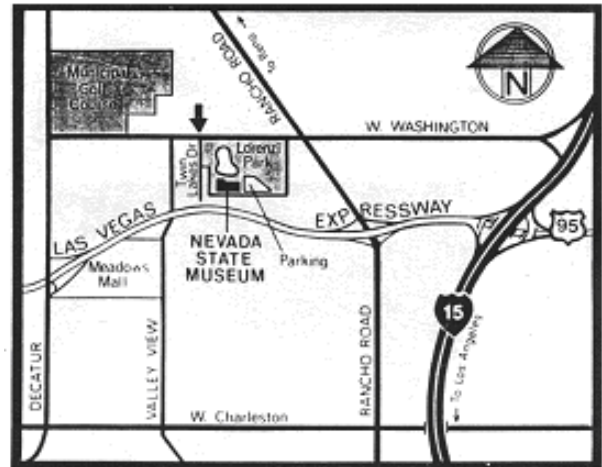
**Tad staying at just the right temperature in his grape arbor habitat**

Dr. Kolmstetter feels that he will probably be on pain meds and antibiotics for about two weeks. During that time he will also be in his special inside habitat. He's very quiet inside; the warmth must be just what he needs. Thank you Dr. Kolmstetter.

## **Summer 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

### **July 16 – Mark Your Tortoise Inside and Out, by Dr. Gary Weddle, DVM**

Dr Weddle discusses how microchips work, what they can and can't do, the importance of registration-keeping current, how the chip placement is done, and exterior marking **Microchipping**. Bring your tortoise if you want to have it microchipped. The cost is \$15.00. **Email or call Kathy at 804-0472 to reserve a microchip.** **Exterior Marking Workshop**. Leave your tortoise at home. We'll show you how to apply your phone number to the shell of the tortoise. You can watch or practice. The Lost Tortoise Prevention Kit is \$10.00, also online.

### **August 13 - How a Tortoise Works: Hatchlings to Hibernation**

**by Betty Burge, MS**

We'll see Betty's talk on seasonal behavior. Terrific information on tortoise care, egg laying, hatchling, and hibernation!

### **September 17 – Tortoise Care Talk, Annual Meeting, and Flea Market**



## **I'm Confused! Who Runs the DTCC?**

Paula Kahn, PhD, manages the Desert Tortoise Conservation Center (DTCC) along with her staff of one Research Coordinator, five Research Associates, one Postdoctoral Fellow in Pathology, and one Postdoctoral Fellow in Translocation Research. Many of you have met Paula, who for years has supported Tortoise Group events by speaking, hosting a field trip, and judging our photo contest even before she accepted her current position. Paula and her staff are all employees of the San Diego Zoo (SDZ or "the Zoo"). Some of you have found this link surprising and have asked how it came to be that the Zoo is operating the DTCC. Here is the answer ...



**Tortoise Group members on patio of main building of the Desert Tortoise Conservation Center during April 2011 field trip**

In 2007, soon after the US Fish and Wildlife Service opened a Desert Tortoise Recovery Office, they set out to find an entity to manage the DTCC. They realized that it would be no small feat to find an organization that could not only manage captive animals, but one that could conduct research to help recover wild populations. They decided to contact the prestigious Conservation Centers for Species Survival (C2S2), which includes five conservation-based organizations. Because of their expertise in local native conservation and their proximity to Las Vegas, the California-based San Diego Zoo was the logical choice to manage the DTCC.

One of the advantages to having the SDZ operate the DTCC is their extensive experience in providing

exceptional husbandry (captive care) to wild animals, including native desert species. Every department of the SDZ's Institute for Conservation Research plays an important hands-on role at the DTCC, including the departments of reproductive physiology, nutrition, behavior, genetics, construction and maintenance, horticulture, public outreach and education, and most importantly, the veterinary and pathology departments. This means that not only do desert tortoises get the best possible care, but Paula and her staff receive training and professional development from some of the most knowledgeable scientists and veterinarians around!

While the SDZ does not contribute funds directly to the operations of the DTCC, many staff members contribute their time, energy, and services to the DTCC free of charge and serve as a valuable resource. Also, the nonprofit SDZ can reach out to donors to support their efforts at the DTCC, and all money raised goes directly into the DTCC's budget to support the care of tortoises at the facility and research on wild populations. To date donations range from small items like a few plants for the hatchling pens and a mini-refrigerator for the lab up to large expensive items like a fancy centrifuge for spinning blood samples and a very sensitive scale for weighing tortoises in the medical center!

You can now see that the SDZ's expertise in husbandry and research, concern for our local desert species, and world-wide experience in conservation research make them uniquely suited to take on this challenging task. After only two years, they have made significant strides in restoring quality care to the tortoises on site. Several research projects are underway to aid in the recovery of wild populations. The DTCC staff enjoyed meeting many of you at the Tortoise Group meeting in March and hosting the field trip to the DTCC in April! You may contact the DTCC at [DTCC@sandiegozoo.org](mailto:DTCC@sandiegozoo.org) with questions.

### **Desert Tortoise link on the SDZ website**

[http://www.sandiegozoo.org/conservation/animals/reptiles/tortoise\\_conservation\\_coming\\_out\\_of\\_its\\_shell/](http://www.sandiegozoo.org/conservation/animals/reptiles/tortoise_conservation_coming_out_of_its_shell/)

### **Link to SDZ Desert Tortoise blogs**

<http://blognew.sandiegozoo.org/category/conservation/desert-tortoises/>

## Surprise Hatchling



Hatchling found in spring by Ron & Jackie Bleck

## 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)

**Question** In March we found the hatchling in the photo in our tortoise habitat. Its egg sack is gone but it can't be very old. Isn't it very early to find one? Have you ever come across this before?

**Answer** This tortoise was probably born last fall and has just now appeared from wherever it was all that time.

**Question** How long can females store sperm?

**Answer** We have heard various answers, from 2-3 years to as long as 15 years. We recently received a phone call from a person whose tortoise produced hatchlings after not having been with a male for four years!

## Tortoise Contact Numbers

TG Hotline: 702-739-7113

Pet Desert Tortoise Pickup Hotline: 702-488-9422

CC Wild Desert Tortoise Hotline: 702-593-9027

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**

**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**  
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**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

**Summer Calendar for 2011**

**July 16**

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**September 17 - annual meeting**

Details on Page 5

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

