

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

Las Vegas, Nevada

An Era Ends with the Passing of Betty Burge, Cofounder of Tortoise Group



Betty Lou Burge devoted her life to desert tortoises

Betty Lou Burge, 79, passed away peacefully in Las Vegas on August 8, 2011. She was born February 9, 1932 in Newark, New Jersey. A wildlife biologist by profession, Betty's interests and accomplishments were many and varied. As Curator of the Youth Science Institute in San Jose, California, she was instrumental in fulfilling their mission of inspiring enthusiasm for science and a love of learning. In mid-life, Betty moved to Las Vegas to pursue a Master's degree in zoology at UNLV.

Choosing the desert tortoise as her thesis topic "because of the dearth of information," launched an era of dedication and passion. Betty was a tireless advocate for both wild and pet desert tortoises. Her field studies are some of the first and still often quoted. She was a significant contributor to the several Conservation Plans developed by Clark County. Begun in 1981, Tortoise Group stands as her crowning achievement. Tortoise people nation-

wide sought Betty's advice and expertise. The individual attention she poured into each caregiver's concerns developed relationships spanning many years. Hailed as an environmental giant, Betty will be greatly missed for her dedication, knowledge, and passion.

Betty is survived by her husband Russell Beck; son Christopher Shupp; two grandchildren Daniel and Loren; brother George Child of Nova Scotia, Canada; sister Nancy Child of London, England; and her cat, Pooka. A celebration of Betty's life will take place on September 10, 3 pm, at the Springs Preserve (no entrance fee; follow the signs). Map on page 6. In lieu of flowers, donations may be made to Tortoise Group.



Newly adopted Homer rests in his burrow with "oversight" from his new best friend, Seymore

Membership Renewals

Thank you to the many members who renewed their memberships in response to our letter announcing the return to a policy of annual membership. In 2012 and following years, memberships may be renewed in January. We very much appreciate your support.

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

About 10 years ago I tried MegaDiet and my tortoise wouldn't eat it. I've been feeding her the salad that she loves. I finally decided to try MegaDiet again after reading about how hard it is for me to give my Shelly the right diet. She gobbles it right up now. I'm glad I decided to give MegaDiet another try.

New MegaDiet Sellers in Las Vegas

Two new sales locations will expand the availability of MegaDiet for Las Vegans.

- Julie at Smoke Ranch & Jones where someone is home during the day to help you – 245-4671
- Peggy at 215 & 95 in Henderson just east of the Fiesta right off Van Wagonen – 281-3048

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

Your tortoise will most likely have a big appetite as the temperatures cool, so be sure to have a good supply of MegaDiet on hand. **Remember that MegaDiet stores very nicely in a cool place over the winter - do not freeze.**

MegaDiet Satellite Sellers

Please call sellers for appointment

Nellis & Owens Georgi – 459 – 1274
Ann & Camino al Norte **new** Don – 374-2466
Decatur & Gowen Toni – 277-6179
Smoke Ranch & Jones **new** Julie – 245-4671
Cheyenne & Durango Susann – 205 -7576
215 & Far Hills Kathy & Pauline
804-0472, 9am – 7pm
~~Rainbow & Alta (no longer selling) — Kellie~~
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
215 & 95 **new** Peggy – 281-3048
Boulder City 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

What Changes in Behavior Should I Look for in the Fall? By Kathy Utiger

Fall brings about a host of changes in behavior. As the temperatures cool, tortoises can stay outside longer, browse, look for a mate, and soak in water.

Sleep Habits

During the peak temperatures of the summer, your tortoise may have been sleeping outside, as the temperature outside was less than that inside the burrow during the night. In Fall, the night temperatures will be increasingly cooler, and your tortoise will probably sleep in the burrow.

Eating Habits Fall will be the time for your tortoise to eat heartily. Be sure to offer a wide variety of browsing plants (see Information Sheet #21) and MegaDiet so that it will have plenty of stores for brumation. I find that Tad eats plants in fall that he completely ignores in spring. Spurge is readily available this time of year. Also, he seems to love dried and dead plants. THEY know what is best for them at different seasons.



Tiny leaves of Spurge are a favorite. This weed appears in damp places, the leaves becoming partly reddish in fall. (note the quarter for size)

Brumation The physiological changes needed for brumation begin in the tortoise **independent of temperature**. So even though it has finally become hot in the Las Vegas area, our tortoises are beginning to change. During brumation, the heart and respiration rates decrease dramatically.

Burrow Temperatures A good burrow is very snug, limiting air circulation and preserving warmth and moisture during brumation. The temperature should be in the range of 35 - 50°F at the coldest times. The best place for a tortoise (even a hatchling) to brumate is outside in its burrow.

Brumation Location If you must brumate your tortoise inside, be sure it is in a cool place that you can check on frequently. Put the tortoise in a box that it can turn around in with a loose cover or towel over the top. Put a thermometer near the box. If your tortoise is at, say, 60 or 65°F all winter, it is losing valuable moisture. For hatchlings, place a lid of water in the box. Hatchlings dehydrate quickly.

Pre-Brumation Check Be sure to give your tortoise a good medical checkup now to be sure it is healthy for brumation. Either do this yourself (Information Sheet #35) or visit one of the vets listed on Information Sheet #24 for a more extensive exam. Start now so that you'll have plenty of time to take care of any issues well before brumation.

Soaking

Besides a good supply of food, your tortoise needs to be well hydrated to withstand the long brumation. Several times this fall, especially as brumation nears, place the tortoise in water shallow enough that its head can easily be out but deep enough that it can soak and submerge its head. It may drink for as long as 30 minutes, so don't be alarmed.

Brumation Behavior

As your tortoise nears brumation, it will eat less and less and come out less often. Then one day you will not see your tortoise again until next spring. Be sure to mark the date on the calendar since, like people, individual tortoises have different patterns. Some may brumate from mid-September to May and others from early November to early March.

The DVD of a talk by Betty Burge "How a Tortoise Works Part II: Hatchlings to Hibernation" from our website for \$10 plus shipping. Don't miss it.

Links to the Information Sheets referenced
www.tortoisegroup.org/infosheets/infosheets.php

End of an Era – The Passing of Betty Lou Burge

By Kathy Utiger

Betty Lou Burge - nurse, vocalist, mother, zoo curator, wildlife biologist, Tortoise Group cofounder. This dedicated, passionate, selfless humanitarian generously devoted 30 years to the study, protection and recovery of the desert tortoise. An environmental giant, she was never too busy to undertake a new project, personally answer all questions, or rush to the aid of a tortoise in danger.

Note from a former coworker:

I first met Betty in the early 1960's when she became the curator at the Youth Science Institute (YSI) in Alum Rock Park in San Jose, California. The YSI still exists and has expanded to several venues in Santa Clara County. Its mission was and is to inspire enthusiasm for science and a love of learning. Much of the success for the YSI can be attributed to Betty's efforts.

Not only was Betty in charge of the welfare of the animals that were housed at the YSI and the various exhibits but also Betty was a gifted teacher and an inspiration for many a young budding scientist.

She took live animals to various elementary schools throughout Santa Clara Valley. There she would introduce children to ecological principles long before they became mainstream. On Saturdays, a group of youths ages 10 to 16 would meet at the YSI where Betty and other gifted teachers would expand formative minds into asking fundamental questions in science. Many of these kids went on to productive careers in science. In the late 60's, she mentored YSI work-study students who were zoology majors at San Jose State.

Betty had a delightful sense of humor that made it fun to be around her. Although it was a rare privilege when we heard it at the YSI, she also had a beautiful trained singing voice that was worthy of the stage. Some of my fondest memories of that time are hearing her sing.

From Franklin Sunzeri

MS in Zoology from UNLV in hand, Betty began field research on tortoises in the deserts of Nevada, Utah, Arizona, and California where she told of happy and fulfilling work. 1500 miles of transects in Arizona alone were the source of papers still quoted today. But when funding for field contractors dried up, what was next? Having already started Tort Group (now Tortoise Group), Betty shifted that same passion and boundless energy to improving the lives of wild and pet desert tortoises.

Tortoise Group started in 1981 when four women whose passion for reptiles and especially for the plight of desert tortoises met to do something about poor husbandry. Those pioneering Tort Group ladies were Norma Engberg, professor of English at UNLV and avid reptile owner (more than 100!); Janis Garrits, biologist currently at the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, D.C.; Suzanne Allen, the artist who drew the Tort Group logo; and our Betty. They created a care sheet, printed it through Norma's connections, and distributed it through the 20 veterinary clinics in Las Vegas. And so it began.

Under Betty's hand, Tortoise Group has expanded to become a worldwide organization serving 3500 members and friends with a wealth of information on the website and personal answers to questions. Behind this woman, in support of her passion and purpose, has been her devoted and loving husband, Russell Beck. Betty, we will miss you. You were a giant among us, a true pioneer and friend.

Emails from those who care:

"May we carry on her work, custodianship, and loving care of these beautiful desert creatures."

"Passing of an Icon"

"Undoubtedly she has the best burrow in all of Heaven!"



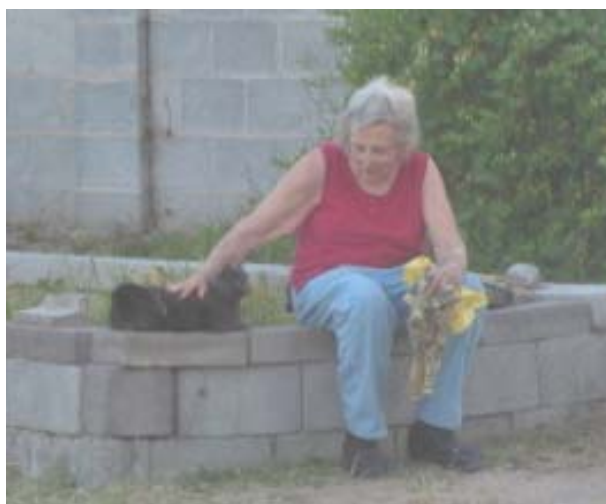
George, Betty Lou, Nancy Lee Child & parents 1950



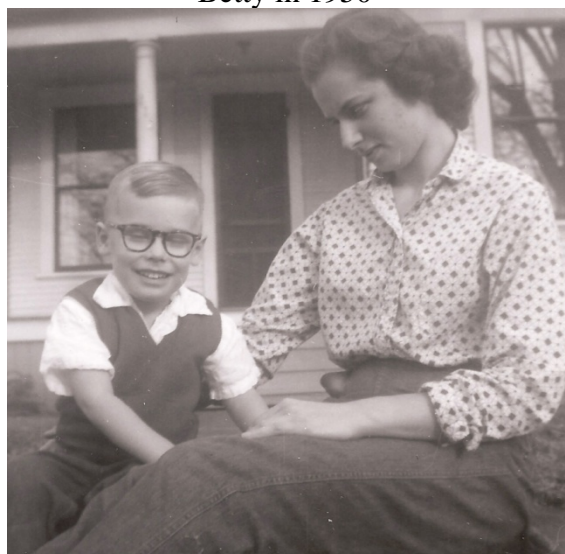
Son Chris, granddaughter Loren, and Betty in 2009



Betty in 1950



Pooka and Betty in 2011



Son Chris and Betty in 1958



Betty

Fall Events

**Saturday, September 10, 3 pm
Celebration of Life for Betty Burge**

**Springs Preserve
333 S Valley View
Las Vegas, NV 89107
(No entrance fee; follow the signs)**



All are welcome. We encourage an RSVP to kathyutiger@tortoisegorup.org is

Birds Eating the MegaDiet?

When we put out MegaDiet pellets so that our tortoise can browse whenever it likes, the birds swoop right in and eat up all the MegaDiet. They love it, too! What is the solution? Build a blind that allows the tortoise to enter but is intimidating to birds and keeps them out.

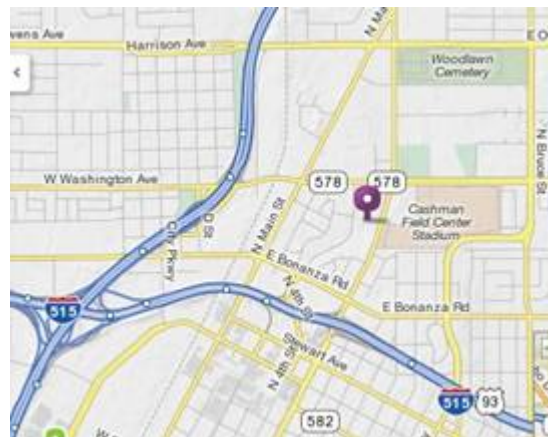
**Saturday, September 17, 2:30 – 4:30 pm
Current Research in Desert Tortoise
Conservation by Vanessa E Van Zerr**

Vanessa will discuss projects including the study of the effects of wildfire on tortoise habitat selection, determining if translocation influences tortoise stress levels, and generating a practical desert tortoise habitat model across the Mojave.

Translocation? Renewable energy projects and tortoises? Come listen and add your opinion.

Also, a very brief Annual Meeting of Members

**Where?
Las Vegas Library
833 Las Vegas Boulevard North 89101**



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



**1. Build a frame 12" x 12" x 14"
high from PVC pipe**



**2. Sew a snug cover from
shade cloth, leaving 2-3" each
leg uncovered**



**3. Insert legs in ground until
side cloth lies on ground 2-3".
Hold cloth sides down with
something heavy. Slit front
cloth at corners so door flaps.**

Microchipping Workshop a Big Success

Dr Gary Weddle microchipped 18 tortoises during the July meeting. Tortoise enthusiasts swapped stories and admired each others' tortoises while

learning about microchipping and exterior marking. Lost Tortoise Prevention Kits are always available at the Online Store and meetings; there will be future opportunities for microchipping.



Dr Gary Weddle (second from right) and others admire tortoises



Dr Gary Weddle implants microchip in right shoulder of Sulcata tortoise, Lolli.

----- 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**

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The Tortoise Group newsletter is
published four times yearly:

March, May, July, and September



Paulette and Betty hold Ashley, Deborah, and Wanda holds Pebbles at the tortoise habitat at the Florence McClure Women's correctional Center in Las Vegas

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