

Tortoise Group News

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PetSmart Charities grant helps adoption push

After the crisis of having to try and find homes for more than 50 pet desert tortoises due to backyard breeding, Tortoise Group is delighted that PetSmart Charities is supporting the building of 10 to 15 burrows. This will assist those who have expressed interest in adoption, but have been unable to do so because of the cost involved.



PetSmart Charities' wonderful and generous grant of \$4,950 will make a huge difference in adopting some of the tortoises, and it is hoped that the 10-15 burrows will be constructed this fall. Some families have already applied to become custodians through the new program.



Dylan is the tortoise that lives with the Cash family. They had a great question about spraying for spiders. Generally, spiders (and other creatures) will reside in the same burrow and there's not usually a problem. Spiders only bite when threatened, and would have to bite a tortoise in its soft tissue to cause any problems, although it is not impossible for this to happen. As tortoises are very sensitive to fumes, it's best to avoid spraying any part of a tortoise's habitat (burrow, or places the tortoise visits in the yard) whenever possible.

Over 50 people attended the MegaDiet RF bagging event August 9 at the University United Methodist Church. We bagged 1,800 lbs in 10# bags and 1,200 lbs in small bags in 45 minutes. Thanks to the Church for donating the wonderful space, and to the volunteers for their record-setting speed!



TORTOISE GROUP

A non-profit, 501 (c)(3) organization since 1982

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Careful what you wish for

If you missed the presentation by Jim Moore at the most recent Las Vegas Tortoise Group meeting, I'd urge you to go and take a look on our website [at the video](#).

It wasn't too many years ago when we are all in a state of panic about dwindling fossil fuels, and how the sun, waves and wind were the future. We pushed and urged for these "renewable" energy sources to be made a priority and used as a clean energy source.

Clearly, from Jim's presentation, we know that solar energy, something we can produce an abundance of in sunny Nevada, has its problems too, and these problems need to be solved, and quickly. There's a major impact on wildlife, and this includes desert tortoises. Habitat and migration paths are affected.

The situation for wild tortoises is still not good, and we still face the issue of trying to communicate that low numbers in the desert and high numbers of pets doesn't mean there's no problem, it means there are two problems.

The recent sterilization clinic at the Oquendo Center, with more than 60 successful operations, shows that there are more methods becoming available in the fight against backyard breeding.

The event went well, with great enthusiasm from the participating veterinarians, all of whom learned a great deal.

Let's hope that this is the beginning of an important new tool we are able to utilize to address tortoise breeding in Las Vegas, and that we won't be in the position of trying to find homes throughout Nevada for hundreds of unwanted pet desert tortoises.



Jim Cornall
Executive Director
Tortoise Group

MegaDiet RF Sellers

Please call sellers for appointment. All are 702-area code unless otherwise noted.

Check [map online](#) for seller locations

33% discount to TG members

Nellis & Owens	Georgi – 459-1274
Ann & Camino al Norte	Don – 374-2466
Durango & Grand Teton	Cathy – 339-5012
Craig & Cimarron	Annie – 306-5096
Decatur & Gowan	Toni – 277-6179
Smoke Ranch & Michael Way	Julie – 245-4671
215 & Far Hills	Kathy & Pauline – 804-0472
Rainbow & Charleston	Jamie – 232-6289
Charleston & Casino Center	
	Trilla at Ace Locksmiths – 528-2237
215 & W Tropicana	Athena – 682-0307
215 & S. Decatur	Carolyn – 534-7888 x824
	378-6514 cell
Russell & Pecos	Sherri – 339-9821
SW of I-15 & Blue Diamond	Shirl – 338-5231
Russell & Nellis	Cindy – 530-9052
Boulder Hwy & Equestrian	Carm – 451-3245
215 & 95 at Van Wagenen	Peggy – 281-3048
Boulder City	Carol – 293-6494
Pahrump	Sheri – (775) 727-5557
Kingman, AZ	Toni – (928) 757-8317

You can also shop at our [online store](#)

No computer? Call Susan at (702) 458-8382

Business Locations

(Member price not available—tax added to price)

<i>Creature Comforts Animal Hospital</i>	658-7339
Ann Rd and US95	
<i>Lone Mountain Animal Hospital</i>	645-3116
Rainbow & US95	
<i>Aloha Animal Hospital</i>	567-5222
S Torrey Pines & Warm Springs	
<i>Moon Sun Landscapes</i>	645-2032
Russell & Boulder Hwy	

Northern Nevada

We are pleased that some volunteers came forward for a variety of tasks during our trips to northern Nevada. Here are our first to sell MegaDiet RF from their homes. Thank you!

NEW: Kym – Sparks (775) 762-3418
Tonya – S. Reno (775) 853-8218
Robin – Carson City (775) 220-0523
Tricia – Gardnerville (775) 450-2259

Annual Meeting of Members

At the brief September Annual Meeting, we will hold the bi-annual election of officers.

The Nominating Committee presented the following slate of officers to the Board: Chair: Kathy Utiger, Vice-chair: Dominique Walton, Secretary: Laura Deitsch, Treasurer: Kirstin Haas.



Frank is one of the most recent adoptions in northern Nevada. He immediately checked out his new home, before demolishing a few petunias and then retiring to his new burrow. More adoptions took place in Reno, Gardnerville, Schurz, Hawthorne and Fallon on the most recent trip north at the beginning of September, when three workshops were also held, focussing on winter brumation in a cooler climate.

New thoughts on feeding MegaDiet RF

By KATHY UTIGER
TORTOISE GROUP

Dr Jennifer Parsons, Nutritionist from the San Diego Zoo, explained to us in June that the tortoise's gut wants to have the same food and the

same amount every day.

With that in mind, I changed from feeding Tad 2-3 times per week to giving him a smaller amount every day. The result has been nice big poops with lots of fiber (which had been rare for him).

I can see that his gut is much happier, and I'll bet he is, too! He still browses on hollyhocks, desert willow, yellow trailing primrose, gazanias, spurge, and the dandelions that are flowering again.

Preparing MegaDiet RF for Maximum Nutrition

I find that it's not so easy to add just the right amount of water to MegaDiet RF.

I want it to be the juicy mash that the manufacturer recommends, but I don't want to have any brown water draining off. That water would carry the nutrients so important for the tortoise. So I try to underestimate the amount of water at first and then add just a bit more for the right consistency.

While some tortoises take a while to get used to it, if you persevere with MegaDiet RF, your tortoise's diet is sure to be much closer to its nutritional requirements.



Tad chowing down on some nice, juicy MegaDiet RF.

Sterilization clinic attracts regional vets

Tortoise Group has sent out several press releases this year, some in conjunction with US Fish & Wildlife Service (USFWS), on the struggle with unwanted pet desert tortoises due to backyard breeding. One method of tackling this problem is sterilization. Tortoise Group was involved in discussions with several groups and USFWS on the potential for a sterilization clinic.



After a great deal of work and planning, this clinic became a reality August 27 and 28 when over a dozen veterinarians, from Nevada, California, Utah, Arizona and Texas attended the clinic at the Oquendo Center in Las Vegas.

Three pioneers of new desert tortoise sterilization techniques, Dr. Jay Johnson of the Arizona Exotic Animal Hospital, and two researchers from the University of Georgia, Dr. Stephen Divers and Dr. Laila Proenca, taught local vets about the new procedures.

More than 60 tortoises were sterilized during the two-day workshop, which drew media attention from around the world. Many of the veterinarians who

learned the new techniques will immediately incorporate them into their practices, some later. Please refer to the Tortoise Group [list of veterinarians](#) who treat tortoises. Although these procedures prevent breeding, they do not change the behavior of the tortoises, especially males.

The tortoises are currently waiting for adoptions; several will be placed in northern Nevada in early September, while others are earmarked for local adoptions.

Yes, the newly-sterilized tortoises are waiting to be adopted. Many have asked if it is okay to have a second, sterilized tortoise. The answer is no, as the behavior of the tortoises does not change.

Tortoise Group played an integral role in the organization of the

clinic, as well as prior to and during the event, carrying out all of the health assessments, helping with soaking, transportation, pre-clinic preparations, administering drugs, post-op care, and recovery work including cleaning, feeding, and all of the paperwork on each of the tortoises.

Thanks go to Liz Cornall for her work before, during and after the clinic, to Janina Little, and to all of the volunteers. Marv Stevens assisted every day of the clinic, and with all eight days of aftercare.

Also assisting were Diana Orgill, Dianne and Michael McLain, Ursula Lambertson, Georgi Shalhoob, Mike Jones, Bonita Alvarez, Lyn Meers, Morgan Frazee, Leigh Ellis, Kate Marten, Robert Furtek, Jennifer Brunner, Toni Downen, Scott Mees, Melissa Ashworth, Judy Anderson, Kathy Utiger, Linda Lundgren and Sherry Hanneman.



Liz Cornall and Marv Stevens perform a health exam on a desert tortoise prior to the clinic.

Fall Behavior—Time to re-evaluate the habitat

By KATHY UTIGER
TORTOISE GROUP

Fall activity seems to have started early at my house. Tad is getting into everything! We find him climbing in the most incredible spots! For the first time ever we found him on his back—on the concrete! We stopped everything, looked at every area from tortoise eye level, and made our habitat as safe as possible. Also, Tad has already started insistently knocking on the slider to come in. He cruises about for a short time and then goes back out. I don't let him stay inside over night. Does he know something about the weather that we don't?

What Is Brumation?

In early fall, a tortoise starts preparing for brumation. It may seem that it's simply a matter of cooler weather telling the tortoise to prepare a spot to spend the winter. However, it's actually a complicated interaction of signals including hormone changes. A tortoise may enter brumation any time between mid-September and early November. The time depends entirely on the individual tortoise that tends to follow the same pattern each year.

As fall progresses, what changes do we see?

- Your tortoise may test various spots for brumation. It may dig in some areas of the yard or want to come in. Many people relate that their tortoise spends the winter in the closet or under the bed. To not lose precious resources and to have a much-needed brumation, a tortoise should be at 35-50 degrees during brumation. Do not let your tortoise brumate inside.
- Eating preferences may change. In the desert, there's only dry vegetation in fall. You may find your tortoise eating dead grass or dry leaves. Also, plants that your tortoise ignored earlier in the year may become favorites.
- Eating may slow down. As brumation time approaches, decrease the amount you feed your tortoise. Your tortoise should naturally be eating less.
- Your tortoise will begin to come out less and less until, eventually, it does not come out at all. Soaking is very important. During the last month, be

Checking burrow size

By KATHY UTIGER
TORTOISE GROUP

Over the years the plywood for burrow top can sag, the tortoise's "improvements" can cause problems, and of course the tortoise grows! I peered in Tad's burrow and was shocked to see that, when resting on his shell, he completely filled the channel! No wonder his shell is getting scraped on the top. In at least one area of the channel, the top is quite low. The solution will not be so easy. I will dig up and rebuild the burrow when the weather cools to have it ready for brumation.

The scraped shell should be the alert. I have noticed that some burrows that fit a tortoise perfectly when small may still have a small opening years later because the entrance dirt is packed hard. The tortoise has to squeeze to get in the burrow, scraping its shell on the burrow top. The solution is simple: loosen the dirt by the opening to create easy access.



sure to soak your tortoise a 2 or 3 times. It is important that your tortoise be well hydrated for the long winter. It will slowly lose moisture through breathing. The cooler and more snug its brumation space, the less moisture it will lose.

For an in-depth discussion of hatchling care and brumation, you can purchase the DVD by founder Betty Burge, "How a Tortoise Works: Hatchlings to Hibernation." The DVD is available at our [online store](#) and at the September meeting for \$10.

Prison tortoises have positive impact

Your donations to Tortoise Group make possible many projects that help both the community and desert tortoises in need. We'll be highlighting these in upcoming newsletters as examples of how your contributions touch the lives of Nevada's tortoises and custodians. We hope you'll be inspired to give generously so that we may continue this valuable work that frequently falls outside the scope of what we can accomplish with available grants.

Our first story in this series highlights the special relationship between several captive tortoises and a thankful captive human who have been brought together for everyone's benefit by Tortoise Group.

At the Florence McClure Women's Correctional Center in North Las Vegas, a newly sterilized female, now named Ava, joined Pebbles and Ruby in the desert tortoise habitat.

Paulete, the inmate who has been the primary caregiver for the tortoises for the past seven years, told Tortoise Group how the animals have made a major contribution in her life.

"When I came to the prison in 2003, there was nothing recognizable about my life. There was no trace of who I once was, and no hope of becoming more than the number I had now become. I did not acclimate well. I made some friends but inside my heart was breaking. I felt desperate and alone.

"Who can see a desert tortoise yawn and not fall in love with *Gopherus agassizii*, the peaceful, placid magnificent creatures that literally transformed and saved my life.

"When I had nothing, Tortoise Group offered me direction and purpose. They gave me invaluable opportunities to learn the many skills required to care for the desert tortoise and maintain the land to sustain them, to learn self respect and respect for others as well. I will forever be grateful to Tortoise Group. My heart will always belong to the desert tortoise of Nevada."

We hope you'll help us continue this and other tortoise work through your support. Click the yellow Donation button on the front page of www.tortoisegroup.org to help us continue to making safe habitats in stable locations.

Please join us for an evening
of pottery painting & fun
to benefit
Tortoise Group

Everyone's Welcome!
Sunday Evening
September 28, 2014
6-9 pm

Color Me Mine

The Art Of Having Fun!
The District at Green Valley Ranch
2255 Village Walk Drive #133
Henderson, Nevada 89052

visit goo.gl/8XXdQp
to register for this event
or scan here



*Paint Pottery
*Buy Raffle Tickets
*Win Gift Cards
*Talk Tortoise!

refreshments courtesy of
Smith's
FOOD & DRUG STORES



Calendar of Events

September 20

"60 Million Years," a documentary by Ellen Seldin.
"Understanding the challenges, successes, and future directions for restoring damaged desert tortoise habitat," by Todd Esque and Leslie DeFalco, USGS

MegaDiet RF in the regular bag and the 10# sack, and new Magic t-shirts are for sale at all meetings. Credit cards are accepted.

General Meetings run from 1-3 p.m.

Las Vegas Library (across from Cashman Center)
833 Las Vegas Boulevard North
Las Vegas, NV 89101

Any additional events will be announced by email

Weaker Endangered Species Act bill approved

WASHINGTON – In a partisan vote in July, House Republicans approved legislation designed to cripple the Endangered Species Act by redirecting funding and restricting the historically important roles of citizens and scientists, in favor of politicians, in decisions to protect plants and animals facing extinction.

“This remarkably shortsighted legislation is yet another Republican scheme to push politics and corporate profits ahead of protecting endangered species and the long-term health of the world we live in,” said Brett Hartl, endangered species policy director at the Center for Biological Diversity. “Diverting the Fish and Wildlife Service’s budget and manpower to punitive reporting

requirements hampers endangered species recovery efforts. This is nothing more than a Tea Party gift to the oil and gas industry and other powerful special interests.”

House Bill 4315 was introduced by Rep. Doc Hastings, the Washington Republican who chairs the House Natural Resources Committee, who has frequently sought to weaken the Act and increase red tape rather than protect wildlife.

Also, the legislation defines the best available science as any data provided by a state or local government regardless of its quality — or even if that data was falsified to further a political objective. The legislation imposes new, burdensome reporting

requirements on litigation related to the Endangered Species Act, despite data on litigation being readily available to the public already.

“Despite overwhelming evidence that we’re in the midst of the greatest extinction crisis in human history, House Republicans keep voting to weaken the Endangered Species Act,” said Hartl. “The Act is an overwhelmingly successful law that has prevented the extinction of bald eagles, gray whales and American alligators and put hundreds of other species on the path to recovery.”

*Press release from the Center for
Biological Diversity*

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

2014

☐ Send my newsletter by e-mail

☐ Send my newsletter in hard copy

3. Check amount you wish for your 1-year membership

☐ \$25 ☐ \$35 ☐ \$50 ☐ \$75 ☐ Life \$500

Special Contribution: _____

33% 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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News in Brief

Surplus tortoise issue in AZ

It's not just in Las Vegas that there's an issue with too many pet desert tortoises. Arizona Game & Fish is reporting problems with people dropping off pet Sonoran desert tortoises, with no place for them to go. For more on the story, go to <http://bit.ly/1rN6frE>

TG in the news

The Sterilization Clinic was covered both locally, nationally and internationally, with articles in USA Today, Nature World News and others.

Springs Preserve Plant Sale

Stock up on desert-friendly plants at the Springs Preserve Botanical Gardens autumn plant sale, Sept. 13 from 8 a.m. to 1 p.m. (or from

7 a.m. if you are a Springs Preserve member).

Native and drought-tolerant plant species are available, and Gardens staff will be on hand to answer questions on plant care.

Tortoise Talk?

A recent article makes it obvious that if you talk to your tortoise, you're not insane; they talk back.

Scientists working in the Amazon have found that Giant South American river turtles use different kinds of vocal communication to coordinate social behaviors.

<http://goo.gl/NA6qtf>

iPads for tortoises

A study at the University of Lincoln in the UK has shown tortoises can learn to use touchscreens.

<http://goo.gl/UbwPLR>

RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

Tortoise Group
1001 Adobe Flat
Henderson, NV 89011

