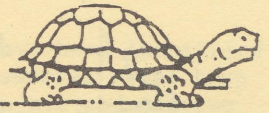
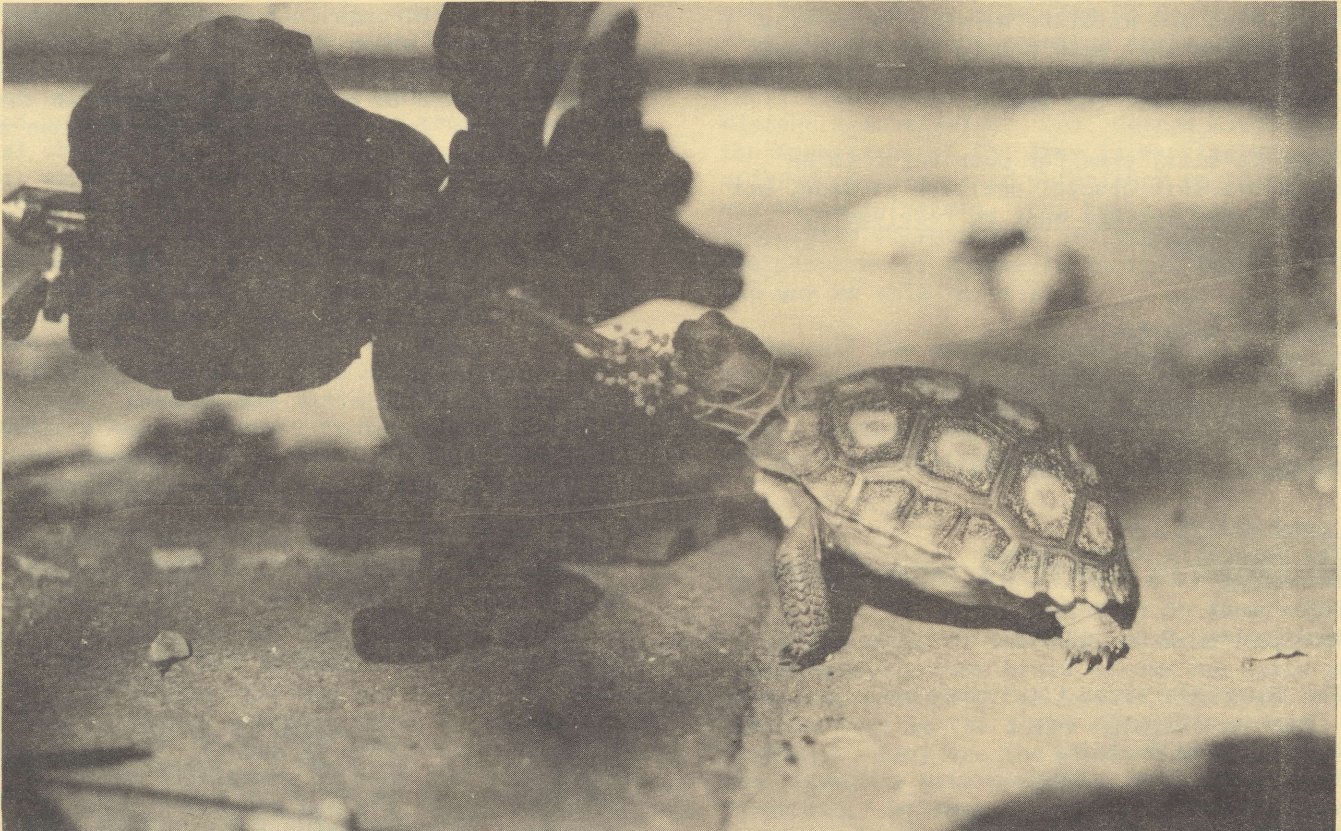


TORTOISE TRACKS



THE DESERT TORTOISE PRESERVE COMMITTEE NEWSLETTER
P.O. Box 453, Ridgecrest, CA 93556

WINTER 1989-90
Volume 10, No. 4



One month old captive desert tortoise hatchling devouring a hibiscus blossom

"If Winter comes, can Spring be far behind?"

Percy Bysshe Shelley [1792 - 1822]

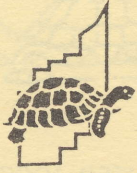
What fate will spring hold for the wild hatchlings who managed to survive long enough to hibernate? Before man's relentless degradation of tortoise habitat, burgeoning raven populations, deadly disease, and the effects of consecutive years of drought, it was estimated that from one to three percent of hatchling tortoises survived to reach maturity.

Those of us—scientists or laymen—who have had the privilege of observing a newly hatched tortoise must marvel at the little being:

- Averaging 45 mm (or about 1-3/4") in length—"about the size of a silver dollar,"
- Without parental care, support or protection,
- Filled with instincts passed down for millions of years.

This is the creature now given the challenge of surviving in a desert assaulted by man and forsaken by nature. What are its chances? Will even a small fraction of one percent survive to carry on the species? The temporary protection provided the tortoise by the Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) under an emergency rule expires April 2, 1990. The action taken by FWS at that time will either bring a ray of hope to our efforts or condemn the desert tortoise to probable extinction—the proverbial canary in the mineshaft, a precursor of doom for the many species of flora and fauna which share its habitat.

The argument for listing is so compelling that we might be lulled into a state of complacency. But the opponents are well organized and are working with vengeance to convince FWS that listing is not necessary. If you have not done, so, **please write immediately**, expressing your support for the permanent listing of the desert tortoise as an endangered species. See Lifeline Fund Report, Page No. 2 for details.



LIFELINE FUND REPORT

It has been gratifying to receive many requests for information about the U.S. Fish and Wildlife

Service hearings on the regular endangered listing for the tortoise, and how to help make sure the listing continues. From my contacts with Committee members and other supporters, I know the Fish and Wildlife Service is hearing loud and clear that many people are concerned about the survival of the desert tortoise, and by implication, all the desert.

There is still time for your voice to be heard before this crucial decision is made, but not much--your letters must be received by January 11, 1990.

Please write to:

Regional Director
Attention: Desert Tortoise
Listing Coordinator
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
1002 N.E. Holladay Street
Portland, Oregon 97232-4181

And send copies to:

The Honorable Manuel Lujan
Secretary
Department of Interior
Washington, D.C. 20240

The Honorable (your Congressional
Representative's name)
House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable (your Senator's name)
Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Many expressed their views in person at the November 20 hearing in Riverside, California, speaking eloquently of their own observations, contrasting thriving populations of the past with forlorn survivors today. Thanks to all who attended, especially the fourteen members of the Southwestern Herpetologists Society, many traveling far to be there, and to members of the California Turtle and Tortoise Club. As one speaker noted, those opposed to the listing could point only to narrow self-interest, while those in favor expressed not only their concern for the tortoise, but for the general welfare, for what is fundamentally in the best interest of us all.

And thanks to all of you who have renewed your membership in the Committee, or have newly joined. Without your support our important education projects, particularly to fight the spread of disease among wild tortoises, would not be possible. If you haven't yet done so, please consider making a special contribution today to the disease prevention project announced in the last issue of Tortoise

Tracks--strong support from you encourages grantmaking organizations to give as well. We must act now!

Habitat acquisition and protection is moving ahead. The first agreement is now being signed for purchase of a critical boundary parcel at the Desert Tortoise Natural Area, part of a group of such parcels targeted by the Desert Tortoise Preserve Committee. This is an exciting breakthrough in our effort to acquire these parcels, whose owners have often paid prices far over the current appraised values. We look forward to many such purchases in the future, as an important hole in the defense of tortoise habitat is closed.

Curtis Horton
Lifeline Fund Director
P.O. Box 70606
Pasadena, CA 91117
(818) 797-0739

BLM HOSTS NATIONAL MEETING ON RESPIRATORY DISEASE IN DESERT TORTOISES

Dr. Kristin Berry of the California Desert District and Sid Sloane of the Las Vegas District hosted two meetings on the upper respiratory disease syndrome (URDS) in desert tortoises on October 12 and 13. The meetings, which were designed to coordinate efforts of research scientists and government agency personnel in the Southwest, attracted attention from news media, conservation groups, lawyers, and environmental consultants. Over 70 people came from all over the United States to share information or to hear the latest news. Tom Dodson represented the Desert Tortoise Preserve Committee at the October 12th meeting.

Dr. Elliott Jacobson of the University of Florida made a major presentation on the research he, Dr. Jack Gaskin, and other research veterinarians have conducted on URDS using funds from the Bureau of Land Management and California Department of Fish and Game. Dr. Jacobson pointed out that URDS is widespread worldwide among many species of tortoises and has been known for some time, especially in imported captives. In captive tortoises, URDS can be chronic. Sick captives can linger for months, eating marginally and looking bad. Sick tortoises survive for months or years with tremendous organ damage before dying. So far, no therapeutic drugs have been consistently effective in dealing with the disease.

In the wild situation, there is no doubt that URDS is a very significant and diffuse disease, resulting in death. It has the capability of wiping out populations.

While the causative pathogen(s) are still unidentified, Drs. Jacobson and Gaskin have learned a substantial amount about the characteristics of the disease in the last few months by comparing the physiology, morphology, and anatomy of ill and healthy tortoises. Dr. Jacobson pointed out that he has only examined tortoises in the chronic stages of the disease and that he (and others) still need to see tortoises in the acute, or early stages. Such tortoises may have no visible, easily identifiable symptoms. Chronically ill tortoises showed significant differences in blood values for hemoglobin, sodium, blood-urea-nitrogen, creatinine, phosphorus, and total cholesterol. Levels of mercury in the liver were higher in ill than healthy tortoises. The thymus of ill animals appeared smaller also.

In the early stages, the disease is confined to the upper respiratory tract. Within the nasal passage ways, the outer, ciliated layers of the epithelium are lost. Tissues are tremendously inflamed and in some cases destroyed. Loss of the ciliated epithelium is probably a very important factor in the disease process, because the protective layer in the nasal passageways is lost.

Viruses, the bacteria Pasteurella testudinis, and Chlamydia were topics of discussion among the group, but so far none have been isolated as the source of URDS. Critical links between nutrition and disease need to be addressed in future research.

Dr. Ken Nagy, Chuck Peterson, and Brian Henen of UCLA were present on the first day to describe their efforts to gather data on blood and urine values, parasite loads, and characteristics of nasal mucous for normal, healthy wild tortoises during the four seasons. Experts in physiological ecology, they are contributing their time to develop a normative data base for comparisons with ill animals. They have study sites at the Desert Tortoise Natural Area, Ivanpah Valley, and near the town of Goffs. Dr. Cecil Schwalbe of the Arizona Game and Fish Department described similar efforts underway in Utah and Arizona.

Several biologists described evidence on the frequency and spread of the disease in wild populations. In California, the most comprehensive survey was conducted by Dr. Craig Knowles and Pam Knowles of FaunaWest on a Bureau of Land Management contract. They sampled 468 live tortoises in the vicinity of the Desert Tortoise Natural Area, Rand Mountains and Fremont Valley. Overall, about 43% of the 468 tortoises showed symptoms of disease, with frequencies ranging from 9 to 70% depending on the location of the sample. Ill tortoises also have been found at Edwards Air Force Base, Stoddard and Lucerne valleys, southwest of Barstow, and near Kramer Junction in the last few months. In California, no tortoises with URDS have been found outside the western Mojave Desert.

In Nevada, ill tortoises have been identified at three sites. In Arizona, several sites have been identified in both the Mojave and Sonoran deserts. The Beaver Dam Slope population in Utah has a high incidence of URDS with high mortality rates.

Several institutions and research scientists expressed interest in working with URDS and related issues in the future. Drs. Kurt Snipes and Tim Carpenter came from UC Davis to discuss previous and future research on Pasteurella testudinis. Dr. Virginia Skinner offered facilities at The Living Desert for research on disease transmission. Col. George Lewis from the Department of the Army in Washington, D.C., offered assistance of veterinary pathologists and microbiologists. Dr. Keith Dupre at the University of Nevada at Las Vegas is working on the respiratory system in turtles and tortoises and may be able to help.

Overall the meetings were highly productive. Participants agreed to hold another session at the 15th Annual Meeting and Symposium of the Desert Tortoise Council in March of 1990 at Victorville, California.

A VIEW FROM ANOTHER PERSPECTIVE

In the world of the captive desert tortoise, there exists a rare breed of men and women who have long been fighting in the trenches...the advance line in the fight against tortoise diseases. They are the pioneering veterinarians who, together with countless tortoise "trustees," attempt to cope with tortoise health problems in general and the upper respiratory disease syndrome in particular. Their dedication and tenacity in the face of grim reality deserves recognition and praise.

In the not too distant past, even basic information about the tortoise was unavailable. We had to rely on experience and common sense to provide for our pets. And pets they are...how quickly one of these remnants of another age can claim his place in one's heart! When an accident (or rarely illness) occurred, we were fortunate to be able to find a veterinarian who would consent to attempt to help. Quite often the doctor would admit that he had never even seen a tortoise before. We managed to muddle through and some of these pets from thirty, forty, fifty and more years ago are alive today.

In recent years knowledge about the tortoise has increased, but so have the medical problems. As soon as one question is tentatively answered, many more emerge. Adequate funding has never been available to determine the basic health norms and profiles, and the doctors have basically been relying on information extrapolated from avian medicine. It's timely that we take this opportunity to acknowledge them. Once long overdue research enlightens and gives the

A View, cont.

answers so desperately needed, the "dark ages" of tortoise care will be history and its heroes and heroines possibly forgotten.

A candid peek into a normal day in the life of one of these doctors would probably reveal that it includes many of the following challenges:

- Searching for that vital bit of information ...which is yet to be discovered.
- Judiciously reading all available current material, attending seminars and conferences, listening to clients, observing, studying, reasoning ... thinking, thinking, thinking.
- Accepting yet another sick desert tortoise, knowing the massive odds against the creature.
- Empathizing with the client who dearly loves the tortoise and is relying on the professional to answer unanswerable questions.
- Working late into the night on a tortoise, performing lengthy surgery or other procedures, which cannot possibly be squeezed into the regular work day.
- Trying to walk that middle line between charging too much and too little, while being well aware of the high cost of laboratory procedures, medication, and x-rays, all on top of the tremendous basic costs of running a small business.
- Fighting the depression which comes with repeated losses in the hope that the next tortoise may be saved.
- And last -- but surely not least -- having to make that ultimate decision and advise a heartbroken client accordingly when all efforts have been exhausted, and finally help yet another precious tortoise slip away.

These men and women truly are my heroes.

Jean Jones, Editor

DESERT TORTOISE COUNCIL SYMPOSIUM PLANS ANNOUNCED

The Desert Tortoise Council's 15th Annual Meeting and Symposium will be held March 30th thru April 2nd at the Holiday Inn in Victorville, California. With current heightened interest in the tortoise, a record attendance is expected. Let's help the Council plan for this event by making our reservations early.

Further information and reservation form may be obtained by writing to Evelyn St. Amant,

Secretary, Desert Tortoise Council, 5319 Cerritos Avenue, Long Beach, CA 90805.

Note: Of particular interest to educators, attendees at the Symposium can earn credit through the University of California, Riverside Extension Department. The instructor will be Dr. Glenn Stewart of the California State University, Pomona. For further information, call the Extension Department at (714) 787-4111.

CHUCK PETERSON TO GIVE ANNUAL DINNER ADDRESS

Charles Peterson, better known to tour guides and docents as Chuck, will give the Annual Dinner Address on January 20th at the Annual Meeting and Dinner of the Desert Tortoise Preserve Committee. The title of his presentation, "How Do Desert Tortoises Get Enough Water and Energy to survive?," is a reflection of his dissertation research project underway at the Desert Tortoise Natural Area and Ivanpah Valley.

Chuck grew up in Michigan, where he enjoyed turtles, frogs, and fishing at his grandparents' lake-side home as a child. In the intervening years, he has not strayed far from herpetology. While completing an undergraduate degree at Michigan State University, he prepared an undergraduate thesis on hibernating painted turtles. In 1984, he came to UCLA for a graduate degree, specifically to conduct research under the direction of world-famous physiological ecologist, Dr. Ken Nagy. In 1987 he began scouting sites to conduct research on water balance in desert tortoises, and within a few months developed a proposal to compare some aspects of tortoise physiology in the western and eastern Mojave deserts. Be sure to join us to learn the latest in how tortoises cope with drought and years of plenty!

The meeting will be held at Hodel's Buffet on Olive Drive in Bakersfield, California. The afternoon meeting offers an opportunity to hear first-hand of the Committee's activities during the past year and of its goals for 1990. The price for the buffet dinner is \$9.00 per person, which includes tax, tip and beverage. For your convenience, we've included information on the reservation form for several motels located near Hodel's.

Your reservation must be received by January 17, 1989. If the need arises to contact the Committee by telephone, you may call Jean Jones at (714) 882-7825 (home) or 884-5906 (office).

Annual Meeting Schedule

Business Meeting	2:00 p.m. - 5:00 p.m.
Social Hour	5:00 p.m. - 6:00 p.m.
Dinner and Program	6:00 p.m. - 9:30 p.m.

Dear Committee Member,

Perhaps you are interested in helping us in our efforts to preserve the endangered desert tortoise and its habitat. Following are areas where we need assistance. These range from occasional tasks to becoming an Active Board Member.

If you feel that you would be able to give some time to this cause, please check in the space provided () before the appropriate number, and send the form to Secretary, Desert Tortoise Preserve Committee, Inc., P.O. Box 453, Ridgecrest, California 93556.

- () 1. Become an ACTIVE MEMBER. A member of the Board will be delighted to discuss this option with you.

Administrative Assistance

- () 2. Letter writing/attending hearings.
() 2. Assist with preparation/mailing of newsletter.
() 4. Contribute graphic arts skills.
() 5. Help with publicity.

Fundraising Assistance

- () 6. Store and ship fund raising products (t-shirts, etc.) by mail.
() 7. Help with or be responsible for selling products and showing slide/video program at Turtle and Tortoise shows.

Educational Assistance

- () 8. Present educational programs and/or sell products for local schools and organizations.
() 9. Educational video preparation.

Tour Assistance

- () 10. Tour coordinator: arrange tour dates and guides for spring tours.
() 11. Tour guide or trainee assistant, two or three times in spring.

Work at the Desert Tortoise Natural Area

- () 12. Participate in work parties twice a year.

Perhaps you have other skills/interests/hobbies which could be helpful. Please let us know.

ALAN BALDWIN AND FRIENDS MAKE SPECIAL DONATION
FOR DISEASE PREVENTION FUNDRAISER

RESERVATION FOR ANNUAL BANQUET

Please make checks payable to the DESERT TORTOISE PRESERVE COMMITTEE, INC. and send to: Secretary, Desert Tortoise Preserve Committee, Inc.
339 West 25th Street
San Bernardino, CA 92405

Checks must be received by Wednesday, January 17, 1990.

Please make a reservation for _____ person(s) in my name, for the Desert Tortoise Preserve Committee Annual Banquet at Hodel's Buffet, Bakersfield, California, Saturday, January 20, 1990. I understand that the dinner will be \$9.00 per person, including tax, tip and beverage. (Payment for this meeting is not tax deductible.)

I am enclosing a check for \$ _____.

Name _____
(Please Print)

Address _____ Phone _____
(Street or P.O. Box)

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

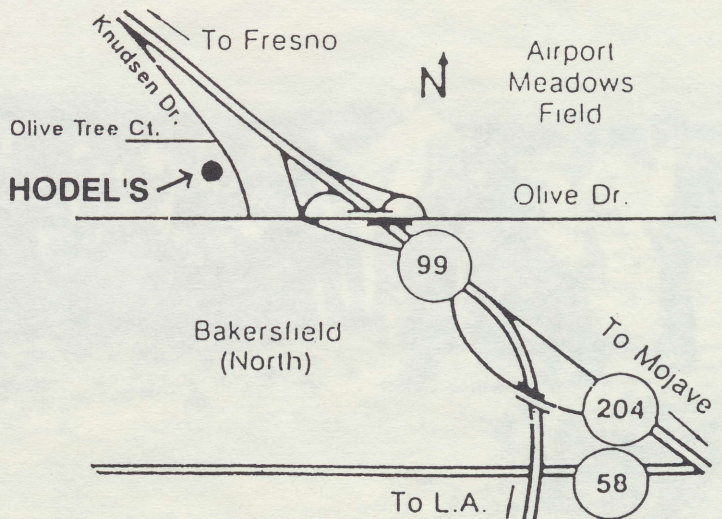
ORGANIZATION AFFILIATION (if any) _____

For your information and convenience, a vicinity map for the Annual Meeting and Banquet is provided below, along with information for three motels, all within a block of Hodel's.

Economy Inns of America
Bakersfield #2 (North)
6100 Knudsen Drive
(Senior Citizen Discount)
Reservations: (800) 826-0778

E-Z 8 Motel
Bakersfield #2
5200 Olive Tree Court
Reservations: (805) 392-1511

Motel 6
Bakersfield (North)
5241 Olive Tree Court
Reservations: (805) 392-9700



ALAN BALDWIN AND FRIENDS MAKE SPECIAL DONATION FOR DISEASE PREVENTION FUNDRAISER

Almost annually since 1964, school teacher Alan Baldwin has made a spring pilgrimage with children and parents from Redwood City School District to Death Valley. Alan first learned of tortoises from Kristin Berry at one of Mike Weber's famous Christmas science classes in Death Valley in 1974. Within months, he altered his itinerary to include the Desert Tortoise Natural Area and has made the visit an annual event. Each spring in late March, Alan brings about 50 people, primarily gifted and talented sixth grade students, as well as some parents and three or four foreign exchange students. So far, he has made 26 trips and introduced about 1300 people to the desert!

Over the years the children have had a lot of exciting experiences. They almost always see tortoises. According to Alan, the children are very respectful of the tortoise, probably because there is something about the dignity of a tortoise that engenders respect. They are excited but wary of the Mojave rattlesnake. Seeing the rattlesnake helps the children to let go of the idea of killing a poisonous animal. They realize the rattlesnake is a beautiful creature and that it is a privilege to see it on its own ground.

Alan Baldwin has nothing but praise for Desert Tortoise Preserve Committee docents who

have helped with the tours. He emphasized how Laura Stockton has developed a competitive game for teams of children to play, compiling lists of plants and animals. The game has turned the children into better observers.

Over the years, Alan, the children, and parents have contributed about \$2,500 to the Desert Tortoise Preserve Committee. This year they are making an exceptional gift of \$750 to initiate the Disease Prevention Campaign! The funds have been raised through hard work, such as hosting pancake breakfasts and selling merchandise at flea markets, as well as donations from parents.

Alan Baldwin's association with the Redwood City School District has lasted for 40 years. In all this time, he has taken only a few years off--once for a Fulbright fellowship to New Zealand--and another time for a trip around the world. In 1960 he was a California delegate to the White House Conference on Children and Youth. Although he officially retired six years ago, he still serves as a special consultant on education of gifted and talented children.

Thank you Alan Baldwin, children, and parents from the Redwood City School District! Please keep coming to see us.



Alan Baldwin and his group visiting the Desert Tortoise Natural Area



FROM THE BLM CORNER

PROGRESS IN LAND ACQUISITION

In 1988 and 1989, the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) received congressional appropriations totaling \$1,500,000 to begin acquisition of private land within the Desert Tortoise Natural Area (DTNA). The appropriations were the result of successful lobbying efforts by the Desert Tortoise Preserve Committee, Defenders of Wildlife, and many other groups. The appropriations came from the Land and Water Conservation Fund Act of 1965, and are generally available for three years. This funding will enable BLM to aggressively pursue land acquisition for several years.

In early 1988, BLM formed a committee to coordinate the efforts to acquire land within the DTNA. Representatives from the Desert Tortoise Preserve Committee, The Nature Conservancy, Kern County Planning Department, California Department of Fish and Game, and BLM's Ridgecrest Resource Area and California Desert District have met every three months to compare notes, discuss problems, and develop strategies. Resources Staff Chief Greg Thomsen of BLM's Ridgecrest office noted that the DTNA committee "...is one of the most rewarding activities I have been part of this year. It is a good example of where the combined efforts of several parties are more successful than each of us going it alone."

In August of 1988, BLM's Ridgecrest Resource Area hired Tom Gey as a Realty Specialist to head up the Bureau's acquisition effort in the DTNA. Tom reports that the acquisition effort has been hampered by a number of problems, including low appraised values, landowner hostility, and small parcel sizes. In 1988 BLM made written offers to approximately 50 landowners within the DTNA. Acquisition progress to date is listed below:

1988 PURCHASES

<u>LANDOWNER</u>	<u>ACRES</u>	<u>PURCHASE PRICE</u>
The Nature Conservancy	1560	\$352,000
Hean	20	\$6,000
Guidett	40	\$10,000
Pfeister	40.31	\$10,100
Farber	160	\$28,000

1989 PURCHASES

Rudometkin	40	\$10,000
Adat Ari El	37	\$9,250
King	40	\$10,000
TOTALS	1,937	\$435,350

While most landowners rejected the purchase offers, many expressed interest in land exchanges. In response, BLM identified

approximately 3,000 acres of public land south of Twenty Mule Team Parkway as available for exchange.

To date, 11 exchange proposals have been developed. Due to regulatory requirements, it takes approximately one year to complete an exchange.

EXCHANGES

<u>LANDOWNER</u>	<u>PRIVATE/PUBLIC ACRES</u>	<u>ESTIMATED COMPLETION DATE</u>
Niederberger	38.75 / 40	November 1989
Novicoff	38.89 / 40	"
Smith	38.9 / 40	"
Howard	38.82 / 40	"
Detjen	110 / 110	"
Welsh	342.5 / 340	"
Maron	157.41 / 160	February 1990
Lichter	81.65 / 80	"
Batz	81.87 / 80	"
Jaskiewicz	38.67 / 40	"
McMahon	30.38 / 30	"
TOTALS	997.84 / 1,000	

Although direct purchases have not met BLM's expectations, they remain an important part of the overall acquisition effort. The acquisition of The Nature Conservancy (TNC) property in 1988, was particularly important as it freed up funds for TNC to purchase additional properties in the east side of the DTNA.

Although progress has been slow, each completed purchase or exchange creates momentum and increases the probability that remaining landowners will sell or exchange. Future acquisition efforts will include developing additional exchange proposals and approaching new landowners with offers to purchase.

Thomas Gey, Realty Specialist
Bureau of Land Management
Ridgecrest Resource Area

LAS VEGAS TRIES TO BLOCK DESERT TORTOISE PROTECTION

Joint action by Defenders of Wildlife, Environmental Defense Fund, and the Natural Resources Defense Council has won emergency protection under the Endangered Species Act for the rapidly disappearing desert tortoise of the Southwest. Secretary of the Interior Manuel Lujan agreed to add the Mojave Desert population of the tortoise to the endangered list on July 24th, six days after the groups sued to force compliance with an earlier petition to protect the tortoise. The ink was scarcely dry, however, before the City of Las Vegas, Howard Hughes Properties, and other Nevada developers filed suit challenging the designation.

The environmentalists' petition, filed on May 31, argued that the desert tortoise is being decimated by a respiratory disease apparently introduced by pet tortoises that were released into the wild. Studies show that, since 1985, tortoise populations have declined 58% in parts of the western Mojave Desert, the heart of the species' limited range. Two-thirds of the remaining tortoises already bear symptoms of the disease in some areas.

"The desert tortoise was in serious peril even before the outbreak of this disease," said EDF wildlife attorney Michael J. Bean, lead attorney in the case. "It was more susceptible to disease because it was weakened by overgrazing of cattle, rivals for the same desert foods, and by collecting, unlawful shooting, and off-road vehicles crushing tortoises and their burrows. Endangered species listing addresses all these factors.

The Interior Department had agreed in 1985 that all desert tortoise populations warranted Endangered Species Act protection, but a lack of resources and strong opposition from ranchers and others in the region blocked action. With the onset of serious disease, however, Interior was unable to ignore environmentalists' claims that the tortoises would be entirely lost without emergency protection.

At press time, the Las Vegas suit challenging emergency listing had met with no success. EDF attorneys Bean and Bruce Manheim are leading the legal effort to uphold the emergency listing for the three environmental groups.

Taken from Environmental Defense
Fund Letter, October 1989

FALL WORK AT THE DESERT TORTOISE NATURAL AREA

On September 30th and October 1st, a hastily organized work party gathered to post the quarantine imposed by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), as reported in the Fall issue of Tortoise Tracks.

A crew from the BLM and three off-road vehicle enthusiasts under the guidance of Mark Strubel placed 100 road closure signs and 350 quarantine notices in the Western Rand Area of Critical Environmental Concern.

Lead by George Moncsko, of the Desert Tortoise Preserve Committee, the following volunteers worked around the perimeter of the Desert Tortoise Natural Area (DTNA): Mr. and Mrs. Lee Delaney, Mr. and Mrs. Rick Hammel, Karle Mahler, Bev Steveson, Chuck Bell, and Roger Dale. The entrance/exit into the DTNA was closed, a double fence was installed across Phillips Road entrance, and 150 quarantine signs were placed.

At the annual fall work party, held the weekend of October 7th and 8th, the following worked the perimeter of the DTNA under the leadership of Ranger Don Dollar:

Dave Bowlus	Phil Lahmeyer
Candace Cline	Mimi Loutrel
Marv Cornett	Tom Lund
Glen Crites	Bob Parker
Laurie Crites	Mary Shepherd
Roger Dale	Mike Shepherd
Warren Forgey	Bev Steveson
Jim Keeler	Laura Stockton
Beverly Kuck	Tom Ward

They made a number of minor fence repairs, removed Russian thistle, and placed 16 California State Regulations signs, 25 DTNA signs, and 67 quarantine notices. Many of these along Munsey Road required the installation of heavy posts.

Bev Steveson
Fence Maintenance Coordinator

NAVY PLANES BOMB DESERT CAMPGROUND NEAR CHUCKWALLA BENCH

Two Navy attack fighters accidentally dropped a dozen 500-pound bombs near desert campers and off-road enthusiasts on November 11th. The two A6-E jets were on a routine training mission at the Chocolate Mountain Aerial Gunnery Range, which is located about two miles from the campsite. The devastated area is within the Chuckwalla Bench Area of Critical Environmental Concern--prime habitat for the desert tortoise. The bombs tore shallow craters, 10 to 12 feet in diameter, in the desert floor and set yucca trees, palo verde trees, and creosote bushes ablaze within a four-acre area. Flying debris struck one man in the chest and dented the campers' motorhome.

It has not been determined at this time whether any tortoises were killed although one tortoise burrow was only a few feet from where a bomb exploded, according a Bureau of Land Management (BLM) biologist.

The incident is under investigation by the Navy, and the BLM plans to assign a biologist to study the damage.

A Happy and Healthy New Year
to All of Our Readers!

FIRST WORLD CONGRESS OF HERPETOLOGY HELD IN GREAT BRITAIN

SEPTEMBER 11-19

Ray Butler and I had a wonderful time in Britain during September, when we went to Canterbury for the First World Congress of Herpetology at Canterbury. Dr. Ian Swingland hosted the meeting at the University of Kent. The Congress was attended by about 1400 delegates from 82 countries. Unlike many national scientific and professional meetings, there were so many sessions dealing with exciting and relevant topics that together we were unable to hear them all. Over 60 papers on turtles and tortoises were offered on topics ranging from conservation, long-term studies, environmental pollution, ecology and adaptations in extreme environments, health and disease, captive management, and evolution and life histories of turtles.

The International Union for Conservation of Nature concurrently held meetings of the worldwide amphibian and reptilian specialist groups. One specialist group, the Freshwater Turtles and Tortoise group, attracted over 100 turtle and tortoise experts from throughout the world. The group focused their discussion on the newly published document, "Tortoises and Freshwater Turtles: An Action Plan for Their Conservation." I participated in the meeting of the Freshwater Turtle and Tortoise Group, as

well as at the Round Table on Conservation Biology. At the latter meeting, I focused on three areas for discussion:

- the upper respiratory disease syndrome and potential introduction of pathogens through release of captive tortoises.
- growth of raven populations and the potential for excessive predation with collapse of existing ecosystems, and
- are mitigation and compensation measures successful?

Participants at the Congress were offered tours to the home of Charles Darwin, as well as entertainment at dinners, barbecues, and receptions. We were all invited to dinner and entertainment at the home of the Lord Mayor of Canterbury. The reception and dinner, followed by Scottish dancing and singing, were held outdoors in a beautiful garden beside a small river. We look forward to the next meeting a few years from now and the opportunities to see turtle and tortoise experts from other countries.

Kristin H. Berry

TORTOISE TRACKS is published quarterly by the Desert Tortoise Preserve Committee, Inc.
Jean Jones, Editor

DESERT TORTOISE PRESERVE COMMITTEE, INC.
P.O. Box 453, Ridgecrest, CA 93556

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