
Tortoise Tracks

The Desert Tortoise Preserve Committee, Inc.

Spring 2003 23:1



Mark Hagan, President of the Board of Trustees, Presents the Golden Tortoise Award to Dr. Mary Brown
Photograph by Mark Massar

DR. MARY BROWN, HONORED WITH GOLDEN TORTOISE AWARD

At its Twenty Eighth Annual Banquet, the Desert Tortoise Preserve Committee honored Dr. Mary Brown with its highest award, the Golden Tortoise, for outstanding research and educational efforts on upper respiratory disease in desert tortoises.

In 1990, Dr. Brown identified *Mycoplasma* as the organism responsible for upper respiratory tract disease as part of Dr. Elliott Jacobson's team effort at the University of Florida to determine the cause of the die-off of tortoises at the Desert Tortoise Natural Area and elsewhere. She took a leadership role in identifying and describing the organism, and in determining the pathogenesis and transmission of the disease.

Over the years, Dr. Brown has continued to address new and difficult questions about effects of this disease on tortoise populations throughout the Mojave Desert, from the DTNA in the west to southwestern Utah in the east. She has sought and won funding to support critical research topics, and has assisted in putting together many workshops,

symposia sessions, and papers on the subject.

Dr. Brown has contributed much valued advice and expertise to the Desert Tortoise Preserve Committee as we develop head-starting and other tortoise recovery programs.

Her numerous publications and those of her students have made wildlife and land managers, other scientists, and the general public aware of the many facets of mycoplasmas and what needs to be done to enhance recovery of the desert tortoise. Dr. Brown's accomplishments have been and continue to be exceptional.

Also honored with plaques for their outstanding contributions were:

- .. Jeff Aardahl, Bureau of Land Management
- .. George Walker, formerly of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
- .. Retiring DTPC Trustees Robert Brooks and Letty Brooks

DESERT BOTANIST HONORED FOR LIFETIME ACHIEVEMENTS

Story by Laura Stockton

On November 3, 2002 Kristin Berry and I had the pleasure of attending a plaque dedication honoring Mary Ann Henry, well-known desert botanist and environmentalist. Close to 100 family members, friends, resource managers and environmentalist colleagues were ferried in 4-wheel-drive vehicles to the Short Canyon parking area in the late afternoon glow of the sun. Attendees arrived from many areas of California and even from Oregon.

The Bristlecone Chapter of CNPS, the Kerncrest Chapter of the National Audubon Society, the Owens Peak Group of the Sierra Club, and the Ridgecrest Office of the Bureau of Land Management cosponsored the plaque. It reads: "In recognition of her pioneering efforts to conduct the first systematic inventory of Short Canyon flora; her decades of service to environmental education; and her years of commitment to sustaining the desert's beauty and biodiversity."

Mary Ann was also presented with a framed certificate with the same inscription.

Short Canyon is now designated an ACEC (Area of Critical Environmental Concern) largely due to Mary Ann's work in cataloging the uniquely rich flora of the area. Her desert plant cataloging efforts have extended to the other canyons along the east side of the Sierra from Tehachapi Pass north to Haiwee Canyon and into other areas of the Mojave Desert.

Mary Ann has been an active member of the Desert Tortoise Preserve Committee since it was founded in 1974 and has made substantial contributions the successes of the Committee. She has conducted plant surveys and inventories on the DTNA and has continued to update and revise the DTNA flora inventory.



Mary Ann Henry, front row center, at the 1989 meeting at which the California Fish and Game Commission voted to list the desert tortoise.

Her inventory efforts at Pilot Knob resulted in the location of the northwesternmost population of the rare Desert Cymopterus. DTNA tour guides have been trained by Mary Ann on plant identification and ecology. She has also been a tour guide for student groups and adult groups delighting all with her insights into the uniqueness of desert plant life. Mary Ann has regularly attended DTPC special events including annual meetings and work parties. She continues to be a strong voice for desert habitat and wildlife on the Ridgecrest BLM Steering Committee.

Those who have not had the unique experience of going on one of Mary Ann's spring flower walks, or seen her in action at a public hearing on an environmental issue, or read her pointed letters to the editor of local newspapers have missed out on several life-enriching experiences. I know my life is richer, my interest in native plants deeper and my dedication to environmental issues stronger because of knowing and working with Mary Ann. I appreciate the efforts of those who arranged for the plaque and this special event where we could all honor Mary Ann in person.



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The Desert Tortoise Preserve Committee, Inc.

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2002 Annual Report
DESERT TORTOISE PRESERVE COMMITTEE
ACCOMPLISHMENTS & ACTIVITIES

The Desert Tortoise Preserve Committee's mission is to promote the welfare of the wild desert tortoise (*Gopherus agassizii*) and the species that share its habitat through its land acquisition, habitat management, education, and research programs. The year 2002 was one of tremendous progress made in all these areas. The Committee took title to 2,163 acres of prime tortoise habitat, developed habitat management plans and made progress in implementing them, took a leading role in advocating for tortoise conservation desert-wide, funded tortoise surveys at the Desert Tortoise Natural Area, and reached out to hundreds of thousands of members of the public through its naturalist, Mojave Desert Discovery Center, website, outreach and other educational programs.

Environmental Education and Outreach

A. Mojave Desert Discovery Centers

The Mojave Desert Discovery Centers are multimedia interpretive kiosks that DTPC designed and fabricated to educate the general public in tortoise and desert conservation. Each kiosk features an interactive CD-ROM web site, videotape presentations about the desert and its wildlife, and customized maps and brochures to guide visitors to featured desert attractions.

During 2002, MDDC units were located at:

- ◆ California Living Museum in Bakersfield
- ◆ California Welcome Center, Barstow
- ◆ Joshua Tree National Park.

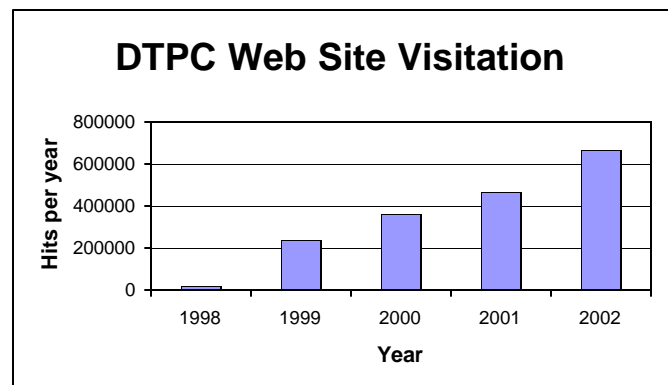
At the end of 2002, DTPC began negotiations to move two of the units to new locations.

B. Educational Materials

Two thousand copies of the DTPC's educational brochures *The Threatened Desert Tortoise* and *The Desert Tortoise Natural Area* were distributed to the public in 2002. Other educational materials distributed included the *Desert Tortoise Life Cycle* poster to schools in California.

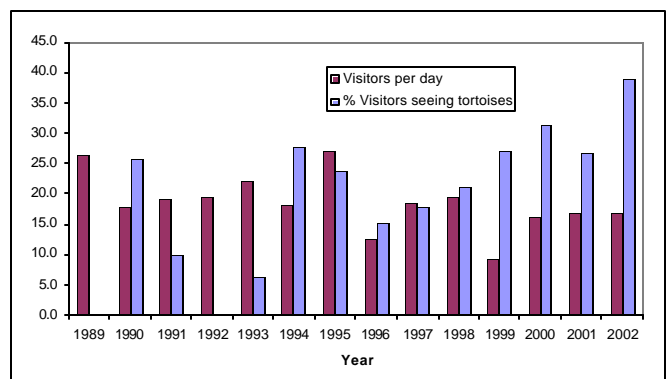
C. Web Site

The Desert Tortoise Preserve Committee web site at <<http://www.tortoise-tracks.org>> features information on the Mojave Desert, desert tortoise biology, and desert tortoise conservation, and a virtual tour of the DTNA. In 2002, this highly educational site had over 660,000 hits, a 42% increase in visitation over 2001 (see figure below). The web site attracts large numbers of students and others researching the desert tortoise.



D. Desert Tortoise Natural Area Naturalist Program

DTPC staffed a Naturalist at the DTNA Interpretive Center from March 15, 2002 to May 31, 2002. During this time, the naturalist recorded 1119 visitors in 418 visitor groups. Most visitors were from California. There were visitors from seven other states and four foreign countries. Despite the dry season a record 37% of visitors saw at least 1 tortoise; 9.3% of visitors saw more than 1 tortoise.



Daily visitation and number of visitors seeing tortoises at the DTNA during the spring season from 1989 to 2002.

E. Environmental Presentations & Outreach

- 1/12/02 DTPC Annual Banquet lecture, Palmdale, Los Angeles
- 2/15/02 California Turtle and Tortoise Club TTCS Chapter, Presentation, Long Beach
- 2/28/02 Friendly Hills Elementary School, Presentation, Joshua Tree
- 3/11/02 Sierra Club, Presentation, Lancaster
- 3/12/02 Our Lady of the Desert School, Presentation, Yucca Valley
- 3/15/02 Edward's AFB, 2 school presentations, Edward's AFB
- 3/15/02 Mojave High School, Mojave
- 3/22-25/02 DTC Symposium educational programs, Tabling, Palm Springs
- 3/25/02 DTC Symposium, Presentation, Palm Springs
- 4/8/02 Palm Springs Library, Natural Sciences Collaborative, Tabling, Palm Springs
- 4/11/02 California Turtle and Tortoise Club Santa Barbara, Presentation, Carpenteria
- 4/19/02 California Turtle and Tortoise Club Valley, Presentation, Los Angeles, Los Angeles
- 5/4/02 Joshua Tree Turtle Days, Tabling, Joshua Tree
- 5/10/02 Joshua Tree National Park Association, Presentation, 29 Palms
- 5/25/02 National Elk Refuge, Presentation, Jackson, Wyoming
- 6/15/02 Kernville Annual Reptile Festival, Tabling, Kernville
- 7/11/02 Joshua Tree Kids Club, Presentation, Joshua Tree
- 8/2/02 California Turtle and Tortoise Club, Inland Empire Chapter, Presentation, Redlands
- 8/9/02 California Turtle and Tortoise Club Westchester, Presentation, West Los Angeles
- 8/16/02 California Turtle and Tortoise Club Chino, Presentation, Chino
- 8/24-25/02 San Diego Turtle & Tortoise Show, Tabling, San Diego
- 9/14/02 California Turtle and Tortoise Club Turtle & Tortoise Show, Tabling, Carson
- 9/14/02 Joshua Tree Street Fair, Tabling, Joshua Tree
- 9/19/02 California Turtle & Tortoise Club Morongo Basin, Presentation, Yucca Valley
- 9/26/02 California Wildlife Center, Presentation, Malibu
- 10/19/02 Yucca Valley Chamber of Commerce

Chili Cook Off, Tabling, Yucca Valley
11/9/02 Matarango Museum, Presentation, Ridgecrest

Public Policy

Significant interaction and coordination with government agencies is essential to DTPC's mission because the desert tortoise, the California State Reptile, is listed as threatened under Federal and state Endangered Species Acts. The DTPC holds an annual coordination meeting with the Bureau of Land Management, and the Board President holds informal meetings with resource staff on a regular basis. The Executive Director is a member of the Bureau's Ridgecrest Resource Area Steering Committee, which meets monthly.

DTPC has been working to protect the interests of the desert tortoise and its habitat in the desert southwest through the United States Department of Interior, Bureau of Land Management's desert planning efforts. The DTPC was an active participant in the NECO (Northern and Eastern Colorado) planning process. The DTPC Executive Director represents desert tortoise interests on the West Mojave Habitat Conservation Plan Steering Committee and its various task groups. The contributions of the DTPC were recognized in the General Accounting Office's December 2002 report "*Research Strategy and Long-Term Monitoring Needed for the Mojave Desert Tortoise Recovery Program*".

Volunteerism

Volunteers devoted 3027 hours of time to help the Desert Tortoise Preserve Committee in the year 2002. Volunteer activities included producing and distributing *Tortoise Tracks*, membership mailings, board meeting attendance, monitoring and conducting surveys at the Pilot Knob allotment and DTNA, product sales, research, regular patrols of the DTNA perimeter fence, and the spring and fall work parties.

Habitat Holdings and Acquisitions

A. Land Holdings

As of December 31, 2002, the DTPC owned

3757.32 acres of desert tortoise habitat in 180 parcels.

Number Parcels Owned	180
Purchased Acres	3378
Donated Acres	379
Total Acres	3757

B. Acquisitions in 2002

Riverside County: DTPC acquired 3 parcels totaling 80 acres of prime tortoise habitat within the Chuckwalla Bench Area of Critical Environmental Concern in the NECO planning area. This area once held the highest known densities of desert tortoise in California's Colorado Desert.

San Bernardino County: One donated parcel totaling 5 acres in southwest San Bernardino County (APN 46143111) cleared escrow.

Kern County: Four parcels (15 acres) were acquired within the existing Desert Tortoise Natural Area (DTNA) boundary. Sixty-eight parcels (2068.42 acres) were acquired in the DTNA Buffer/Expansion Area for a total of 2083.42 acres in Kern County.

C. Habitat in Escrow

Los Angeles County: Donated 2.5-acre lot (APN 3326005081) inside the southern boundary of the Fremont-Kramer Critical Habitat Unit.

San Bernardino County: Two donated parcels of 10 acres in southwest San Bernardino County (APN 46143109 and APN 46143112). This parcels lies near the County line in the southern end of the Fremont-Kramer Critical Habitat Unit adjacent to other DTPC owned land.

D. New Habitat Acquisition Agreements In 2002

Los Angeles County:

Palmdale School District - Ana Verde Elementary School - Acquire 7.50 acres within DTNA
 Palmdale School District - Ponderosa Elementary School - Acquire 6.04 acres within DTNA
 City Of Palmdale - Avenue "S" Street Widening Project - 5.45 acres in DTNA
 City Of Palmdale - Amargosa Creek - Acquire 14.45 acres

Birdies Driving Range & Training Academy - Acquire 10 acres

Riverside County:

CEC-Blythe Energy Project – Acquire additional 80 acres within Chuckwalla Bench.

San Bernardino County:

Arami & Associates - Acquire 10 acres
 Rothbart Development - Acquire 15.40 acres

Habitat Management & Stewardship

A. Kern County

In Kern County, the Desert Tortoise Preserve Committee owns 849 acres of desert tortoise critical habitat and manages 240 acres under conservation easement, largely in and around the Desert Tortoise Natural Area. The Committee works cooperatively with the Bureau of Land Management and the State of California in managing and protecting the 39.5 square mile Desert Tortoise Natural Area.

Stewardship activities included holding 2 work parties at the DTNA, and regular fence patrols by DTPC volunteer Chuck Hemingway. In 2002, the Committee recruited and staffed a naturalist at the DTNA during the spring visitor season to monitor and provide interpretive services to visitors.

During 2002, DTPC developed a management plan for the DTNA and the surrounding area. DTPC is seeking to effectively expand the DTNA by acquiring privately held tortoise habitat that lies between the current DTNA boundary and the Randsburg-Mojave Road, and east of the current DTNA boundary to the Randsburg-Mojave Road.

B. San Bernardino County

At the close of 2002, the Desert Tortoise Preserve Committee owned 725 acres of desert tortoise habitat in San Bernardino County, largely in the Superior Cronese Critical Habitat Unit but with some in the Fremont-Kramer and Ivanpah Critical Habitat Units. Since 1995, the Committee has controlled the 42,000-acre Pilot Knob grazing allotment and the associated structures at Blackwater Well and has been managing the allotment for the benefit of the desert tortoise. Highlights of 2002 included completion of a

Management Plan for the allotment and the removal of approximately 1.5 miles of fence from inside the Grass Valley wilderness during the DTPC's spring and fall work parties.

DTPC has installed tortoise-proof fencing along 11.4 linear miles of Harper Lake Road near Hinkley, California, pursuant to a Memorandum of Understanding between DTPC and the California Energy Commission. Desert tortoise-proof fencing has now been erected along 66% of both sides of the stretch of road. In 2002, the engineering design phase for under-road culverts to allow safe passage of tortoises across the road was completed.

Research

A. Desert Tortoise Status

In spring 2002, the DTPC was awarded a challenge grant from the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation to fund tortoise surveys of the 3 square mile Interpretive Center permanent study plot at the DTNA. Matching funds and additional support came from the California Department of Fish and Game,

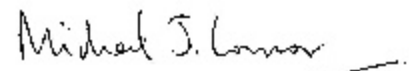
the United States Geological Survey, and the Bureau of Land Management.

B. Mohave Ground Squirrel Status

In spring 2002, with support from the California Energy Commission, DTPC funded successful surveys for the state-threatened Mohave ground squirrel on DTPC preserve lands at the Pilot Knob grazing allotment.

C. Desert Tortoise Council Annual Symposium

Presentation by the DTPC Executive Director Michael J. Connor at the Desert Tortoise Council Symposium held in Palm Springs, California, April 2002: *Conservation Through Cooperation: Desert Tortoise Preserve Committee Achievements and Plans for 2001-2002*.



Michael J. Connor, Ph.D.
Executive Director

Natural History Notes

Range and Habitats of the Desert Tortoise

The range of the desert tortoise extends from southwestern Utah in the United States to the northern portion of Sonora, Mexico. Three distinct populations of desert tortoises are recognized as shown on the map—the Mojave, Sonoran, and Sinaloan populations. Within each of these populations, desert tortoises occupy a wide diversity of habitats and climatic zones, and exhibit differences in shell shape, reproductive output, behavior, activity patterns, and other characteristics.

In the northern third of its range—in the Mojave Desert—the desert tortoise occurs in creosote bush scrub and Joshua tree woodlands. Tortoises here dig burrows in soft loamy sand in the broad desert valleys or in the gently sloping bajadas coming off the mountains. Rainfall is light, occurring mainly in the winter and spring, with summers being hot and dry. Peak tortoise activity takes place in the spring and again in the fall, followed by a long winter hibernation.

~~In the central portion of their range— in the Sonoran Desert of Arizona— tortoises are no longer found in the valley flats, but instead are found almost exclusively in steep rocky hillsides. Tortoises use rock shelters and small caves instead of long soil burrows. Rainfall is higher, with a significant portion falling in summer. Because of the rainfall, peak tortoise activity is in summer.~~ ®

DESERT TORTOISE PRESERVE COMMITTEE

MEMBERSHIP/DONOR FORM

NAME _____ DATE _____
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 CITY _____ NEW
 STATE _____ ZIP _____

Individual membership	\$ 15 annually	[]
Family membership	\$ 20 annually	[]
Sponsor membership	\$ 30 annually	[]
Benefactor membership	\$ 75 annually	[]
Patron membership	\$100 annually	[]
Life	\$500	[]

Membership Dues	\$ _____
Additional Donation	\$ _____
Total Enclosed	\$ _____

DONATION ONLY

Enclosed is my donation of \$ _____

Please make checks payable to: **DTPC**

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The DTPC is an IRS recognized tax-exempt 501 (c)(3) nonprofit corporation. All contributions above the basic \$15 annual membership dues are tax-deductible to the full extent allowed by law.

All contributors receive the quarterly newsletter *Tortoise Tracks*.

Membership and donor information are kept confidential and will not be disclosed to third parties.

I WANT TO VOLUNTEER

My area of interest/expertise is:

My e-mail address is:

Tortoises in the southern portion of their range—the Sinaloan population—occupy a region of tropical deciduous forests with dark, wet floors. Rainfall is considerably higher and occurs chiefly in the summer, with a pronounced spring drought. It is believed that tortoises remain active during the mild winter, but may estivate during the spring dry season.

Of the three populations, the Mojave is by far the most well studied; comparatively little is known about the Sinaloan tortoises. Recently, data has revealed significant genetic and ecological differences among these three populations. Further studies are needed, however, to determine if these differences are great enough to warrant separate species status for the populations.

Readers are advised to read the articles in the December 2002 issue of *Chelonian Conservation and Biology* for detailed background on this topic.





Tortoise Tracks

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Desert Tortoise Preserve Committee's
Fall Work Party
11-12 October 2003

Desert Tortoise Preserve Committee's
Spring Work Party
28-29 March 2003

DTPC CALENDAR OF EVENTS
