
Tortoise Tracks

The Desert Tortoise Preserve Committee, Inc.

Spring 2005 25:1



Decades of ORV use and sheep grazing at Camp "C" have taken their toll on the delicate desert ecology. Top left, over 20 acres of habitat have been completely denuded; Top right, soil compaction leads to run off and erosion; bottom left, ORV activities have spilled off into adjacent habitat; bottom right, one of the areas remaining resident tortoises.

DESERT TORTOISE PRESERVE COMMITTEE TO ACQUIRE AND RETIRE CAMP "C"

Story & Photographs by Michael J. Connor

In 1974, a handful of volunteers formed the Desert Tortoise Preserve Committee to establish the first tortoise reserve in the western United States. This vision was realized in 1980 with the Federal designation of the 39.5 square mile Desert Tortoise Research Natural Area (DTNA) in southeastern Kern County. Since then, your Committee has worked diligently to acquire and protect over 16 square miles of private land holdings that lay within the DTNA, and to manage this habitat to reduce the many threats that menace the wild desert tortoise population.

Success story though this may be, the DTNA itself

has increasingly become a peninsular of pristine habitat surrounded by degraded lands that are the focus of tortoise-incompatible, human-activities. In 2002, to counter this growing threat of isolation, the DTPC launched a major initiative to expand the DTNA to include prime tortoise habitat to the west, southeast and east.

DTPC has made great progress in moving ahead with its proposed 26 square mile addition to the DTNA. DTPC has acquired 4,500 acres (about 40%) in the eastern expansion area and expects to reach the 50% mark in the next few years. When completed, the eastern

expansion area will provide a significant habitat corridor from the existing DTNA boundary to Federally designated critical habitat. This habitat is home to desert tortoises and other imperiled wildlife such as the Mohave ground squirrel.

The DTNA expansion proposal got a major boost with the recent donation of Camp "C" to DTPC by the Center For Biological Diversity. The Center For Biological Diversity acquired 30 acres of habitat including Camp "C" as part of a settlement of a lawsuit filed by the Center For Biological Diversity and Defenders of Wildlife relating to the test track being built by Hyundai of America at the south end of California City.

Located 1 mile east of the current DTNA boundary, Camp "C" has long been a major staging area for local unauthorized and authorized off-road vehicle activity on surrounding private land and on public land in the Rand Mountains to the north. It is a major source of many of the threats that impact the areas tortoises. Its closure will reduce direct threats to the area's tortoises and habitat that are posed by off-road vehicles, trash, the ravens that feed on the trash, vandalism, seasonal grazing by sheep, and uncontrolled dogs. These threats are all human-related and therefore manageable through use of appropriate fencing and other measures.

The DTNA expansion will facilitate recovery of the desert tortoise by reducing threats to the resident tortoise population, will expand the DTNA to more readily defended boundaries, will establish a permanent corridor to desert tortoise critical habitat to the east, and will greatly enhance the Natural Area's integrity and long-term viability.

NEW DTPC LIFE MEMBERS

**CTTC Kern County Chapter
Angie Frankenthal**



Telephone: (951) 683-3872
Fax: (951) 683-6949
e-mail: <dtpc@pacbell.net>
<http://www.tortoise-tracks.org>

**MOJAVE DESERT
SPRING FLOWER WALK
SATURDAY
APRIL 23, 2005**

TIME: 8:00 a.m.

LOCATION: DESERT TORTOISE NATURAL AREA

ITEMS TO BRING: hat, sun screen, day pack, water, lunch, flower books, a hand lens, binoculars. Good walking shoes a must.

FOR RESERVATIONS CALL: Stephanie Pappas
805-901-8746 or email <csf@att.net>

DESCRIPTION: Kristin H. Berry, Ph.D. will lead a field trip identifying beautiful spring wild flowers at the Desert Tortoise Natural Area. She has been collecting information on flora of the Natural Area for several years. There is over 200 species of flowering plants on the Natural Area. Germination of annual wildflowers occurs when moisture is abundant and with the rains this year the perennial and annual flowers should be abundant and full of color. The flower walk will emphasize plants the desert tortoises eat and shrubs used to provide cover for burrows.

FEE: \$50.00 (members) \$75.00 (non-members) additional contributions welcomed

Sponsored by the Desert Tortoise Preserve Committee
(limited space available)

Land Donation Honors Inez Halloran Maury

Dr. Elizabeth Maury has kindly donated land to the DTPC in honor of her mother, Inez Halloran Maury (1909-1984) of Studio City, California.

Inez Maury was a lifetime advocate for the environment and a member of the DTPC. She loved the desert habitat.

This parcel will be used for sale or exchange to acquire desert tortoise habitat.

The Desert Tortoise Preserve Committee, Inc. Founded 1974

Executive Director
Michael J. Connor, Ph.D.

Board of Trustees

President	Mark Hagan
Vice President	Mark Massar
Treasurer	Laura Stockton
Recording Secretary	Stephanie Pappas
Board Member	Kristin Berry, Ph.D.
Board Member	Kim Clark

ANNUAL REPORT DESERT TORTOISE PRESERVE COMMITTEE ACCOMPLISHMENTS & ACTIVITIES IN 2004

The Desert Tortoise Preserve Committee's mission is to promote the welfare of the wild desert tortoise (*Gopherus agassizii*) and the other species that share its habitat through its land acquisition, habitat management, research, and education programs. This Annual Report highlights the Committee's many achievements and accomplishments in 2004. As you will see, your support has ensured that 2004 was another outstanding year in furthering the Committee's mission.

Habitat Acquisition & Land Holdings

A. Land Holdings

On December 31, 2004, the DTPC held title to 219 parcels of land including 4,445 acres of desert tortoise habitat. These parcels are located in California in the counties of Kern (3,655 acres), Riverside (80 acres) and San Bernardino (710 acres).

B. 2004 Acquisitions

Kern County

Fifteen parcels (251 acres valued at \$220,500) were acquired within the Desert Tortoise Natural Area and the DTNA Expansion Area. This includes four parcels of land (6.5 acres valued at \$13,937) that were donated to DTPC. The Assessor Parcel Numbers (APN) are:

181-280-20	217-012-06	217-032-01	267-022-07
269-150-01	269-180-30	269-162-06	275-201-09
284-122-19	334-072-08	470-050-15	470-050-17
470-050-32	470-060-05	470-070-23	

Riverside County

DTPC completed acquisition of APN 709-430-040-5, a 20-acre parcel of tortoise habitat located within the boundary of the former Chuckwalla Bench Area Of Critical Environmental Concern.

The Chuckwalla Bench ACEC is now incorporated within the Chuckwalla Desert Wildlife Management Area. This region once hosted the highest known densities of desert tortoise in California's Colorado Desert.

C. Habitat in Escrow On December 31, 2004

San Bernardino County

Two donated parcels of 10 acres in southwest San Bernardino County.

Kern County

Five parcels encompassing 63 acres in the Desert Tortoise Natural Area and the DTNA expansion area.

D. Habitat Acquisition Agreements Signed in 2004

Los Angeles County

Agreements to acquire 222 acres of replacement habitat.

- California Army National Guard – Lancaster Armory Project, acquire 23 acres;
- Lancaster Redevelopment Agency – Western Fox Field Project, acquire 69 acres;
- Littlerock Community Presbyterian Church, acquire 2.5 acres;
- Pulte Homes Corporation – Palmdale Residential Development, acquire 90 acres;
- Rothbart Development – Palmdale Regional Shopping Center, acquire 17.5 acres;
- Wilsons School District, acquire 20 acres.

San Bernardino County

Agreements to acquire 97.6 acres of replacement habitat.

- Beazer Homes, acquire 0.6 acres;
- Frontier Homes, acquire 20 acres;
- Victorville Redevelopment Agency – Foxborough Industrial Area, acquire 77 acres.

Habitat Management & Stewardship

Kern County

The DTPC 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 in southeast Kern County. The Committee owns 3,655 acres of desert tortoise critical habitat and manages 240 acres under conservation easement, in and around the Desert Tortoise Natural Area.

Major stewardship activities include holding work parties at the DTNA, and regular fence patrols. For the sixteenth year, the Committee recruited and staffed a naturalist at the DTNA during the 2004 spring season to monitor visitors and provide interpretive services.

During 2004, DTPC continued to implement its proposed expansion of the DTNA by acquiring privately held tortoise habitat that lies between the current DTNA boundary and the Randsburg-Mojave Road, and by working with state and federal agencies to include the DTNA expansion proposal in project evaluation. The Bureau of Land Management's draft West Mojave Plan proposes including DTPC lands in the vicinity of the DTNA in the proposed Fremont-Kramer Desert Wildlife Management Area.

San Bernardino County

The Desert Tortoise Preserve Committee owns 710 acres of desert tortoise habitat in San Bernardino County, in the Superior-Cronese Critical Habitat Unit, the Fremont-Kramer Critical Habitat Unit and the Ivanpah Critical Habitat Unit. 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 2004 include removal of approximately 1 mile of fence from inside the Grass Valley wilderness and the permanent removal of dangerous structures from Blackwater Well. The Bureau of Land Management's draft West Mojave Plan proposes permanent retirement of the Pilot Knob grazing allotment.

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 and an under-road culvert installed – the Harper Lake Road Tortoise Crossing – to allow tortoises safe passage across this road which is used by heavy truck traffic to the Harper Lake generating plant. This is a major milestone being the first purpose built tortoise crossing in the West Mojave Desert Tortoise Recovery Unit.

Riverside County

In Riverside County, the Desert Tortoise Preserve Committee owns 80 acres of desert tortoise critical habitat in the Chuckwalla Desert Wildlife Management Area. During 2004, site visits were made to existing holdings and potential acquisition properties. Sites were inspected for suitability as desert tortoise and Harwood's milkvetch habitat.

Environmental Education and Outreach

A. Mojave Desert Discovery Centers

The Mojave Desert Discovery Centers (MDDC) 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 2004, MDDC units were located at:

- California Welcome Center, Tanger Outlet Mall, Barstow;
- Kern County Library, California City Branch (until July 2004);
- Kern County Library, Wanda Kirk Branch, Rosamond (installed July 2004).

B. Educational Materials

- Distributed thousands of copies of the DTPC's educational brochures *The Threatened Desert Tortoise* and *The Desert Tortoise Natural Area*.
- Distributed 3,200 copies of the DTPC newsletter *Tortoise Tracks*.

C. Website

The Desert Tortoise Preserve Committee Website 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 2004, this highly educational site had over 730,200 hits. The Website caters to large numbers of school students and others researching the desert tortoise.

D. Public Policy & Comment

Interaction and coordination with government agencies is essential to DTPC's mission because the desert tortoise is listed as threatened under Federal and California Endangered Species Acts. The DTPC Trustees hold an annual coordination meeting with the Bureau of Land Management, and the DTPC Executive Director holds informal meetings with resource staff on a regular basis and represents the desert tortoise interest groups in desert regional planning efforts such as the West Mojave Plan. The Executive Director is a member of the BLM Ridgecrest Resource Area Steering Committee.

Written comments were submitted on the following actions impacting the desert tortoise and its habitat including off-road vehicle use, livestock grazing, ravens, and translocation:

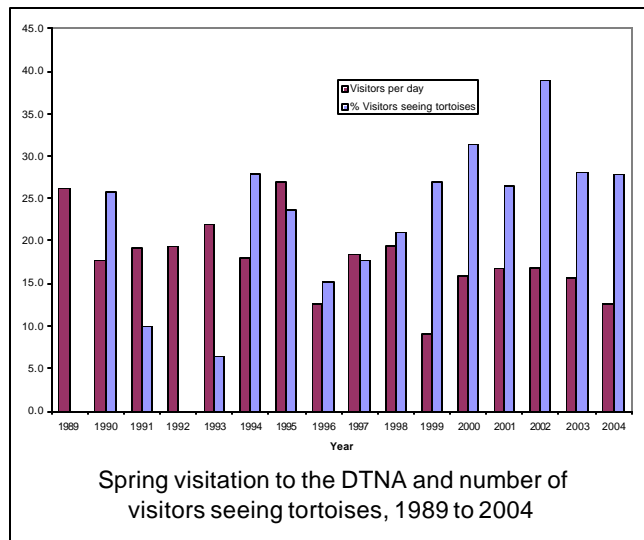
- Environmental Assessment for the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency's Grand Challenge, 1/27/04
- Proposed Revisions to Grazing Regulations for the Public Lands, Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DES 03-62), 2/27/04
- Proposed Tortoise Translocation From Hyundai Site To DTNA: 3/17/04
- Desert Tortoise Recovery Plan Assessment, 4/17/04
- Fort Irwin expansion SDEIS, 6/15/04
- USFWS Raven Management Environmental Assessment scoping, 8/13/04
- BLM NOPA for 10 grazing allotments (NOPA-CA-690-04-02) from BLM, Needles Field Office, 8/23/04
- California high speed rail program EIR/EIS, 8/27/04
- Environmental Assessment for renewal of eight cattle grazing allotment leases by the BLM Barstow Field Office, 8/31/04
- Environmental Assessment for renewal of six grazing leases for ephemeral sheep grazing operations by the Barstow Field Office, 8/31/04
- Environmental Assessment livestock grazing authorizations (CA-650-2004-36) Cantil Common, Monolith Cantil, Boron, Bissell, Antelope Valley, Warren,

Spangler Hills, Hansen Common, Lava Mountain, Rudnick Common, and Walker Pass Common sheep allotments; BLM Ridgecrest Field Office, 9/20/04

- Draft Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement on Wind Energy Development on BLM-Administered Lands in the Western United States, 12/7/04

E. Desert Tortoise Natural Area Naturalist Program

For the sixteenth consecutive year, DTPC staffed a Naturalist at the DTNA Interpretive Center, and had a



naturalist on duty for 77 days from March 21, 2004 to June 7, 2004.

The naturalist recorded 960 visitors in 387 visitor groups. Some 28% of visitors saw at least 1 tortoise; 7% of visitors saw more than one tortoise.

F. Environmental Presentations & Outreach

Nine educational presentations to Turtle and Tortoise Club groups and others and participated in 6 public and government agency meetings.

The Executive Director gave a presentation at the Desert Tortoise Council Symposium held in Las Vegas, Nevada, February 2004: *Desert Tortoise Conservation and Recovery Accomplishments of the Desert Tortoise Preserve Committee in 2003* by Michael J. Connor.

Research

A. Mohave Ground Squirrel Status

With financial support from the California Department of Fish and Game, DTPC conducted surveys for the state-threatened Mohave ground squirrel at multiple locations south of Highway 58.

B. Harwood's Milkvetch

Harwood's milkvetch locations identified in 2003 were revisited in 2004 to determine an appropriate conservation strategy for this rare, localized, annual plant.

The prime locations for the milkvetch are in deep scoured, washes on public land in the Chuckwalla DWMA. The Corn Springs Wash population, the largest known occurrence, appeared to be robust and adequately protected. It was concluded that the best conservation strategy for the milkvetch would be to establish a seed bank to assure the plants future survival.

C. Photomonitoring at the DTNA

Detailed comparison of photographs of desert sites taken decades apart allows for objective documentation of habitat disturbance and recovery. Repeat photography was conducted at 67 sites in and around the DTNA that had been previously photographed in 1985. Matching funds for this project were provided by the BLM.

Volunteerism

Volunteers devoted 2862 hours of time to help the DTPC in the year 2004. Volunteer activities included board meeting attendance, monitoring and conducting surveys, product sales, research, and work parties.

The DTPC held an Ethics Workshop on June 19, 2004. This refresher course in board members duties and responsibilities was moderated by Jeff Ogata and attended by representatives from DTPC and 5 other nonprofit organizations.

Board Of Trustees

The Board of Trustees manages the Committee's affairs, sets goals, proposes amendments to the bylaws, and appoints staff and subcommittees. Elections to the Board were held at the Annual General Meeting in January. The following served on the Board of Trustees during 2004:

Kristin Berry
 Arthur Braudrick (resigned September, 2004)
 Mark Hagan
 Jill Heaton (resigned June, 2004)
 Mark Massar
 Stephanie Pappas
 Laura Stockton

The Desert Tortoise Preserve Committee's successes in 2004 would not be possible without the help of our many contributors. Thank you all for your support and for joining with us in our efforts to promote the welfare of the desert tortoise in the wild.

Michael J. Connor, Ph.D.
 Executive Director

This Annual Report is published in *Tortoise Tracks* and is available to the public at <<http://www.tortoise-tracks.org>>.

Natural History Notes

Tortoises in the Dust the Life of a Field Biologist By Mark Massar



Studying Desert Tortoise Behavior

- (1) Base Camp:** Tarp marks the living area and provides safety from scorpions. **Photograph by Mark Massar**
- (2) Observation Post:** Life without the umbrella would be extremely uncomfortable. **Photograph by Mark Massar**
- (3) Desert Tortoise:** Focal observation of an individual tortoise required recording behavior on a minute to minute basis for an entire day. **Photograph by Mark Bratton**

This past summer, I spent 22 days at a remote study plot in the middle of the Mojave Desert. The plot is located approximately 20 miles northwest of Baker near the southern tip of Death Valley. I was involved in a study (as part of my Master's degree) to investigate the social behavior of desert tortoises. My study is part of a larger, long-term study by Dr. Kristin Berry to study the social behavior of wild desert tortoises in an area relatively free from human disturbances. This is one of the most intensive studies of the lives of wild desert tortoises.

Because the plot is located in one of the hottest, driest places on earth, and because I stayed at the plot for 7 to 10 days straight, I had to take several precautions to make life bearable out there. The other field biologists and I set up our base camp at the foot of a twenty-foot vertical cliff of consolidated gravel. This cliff provided the only measurable shade on the plot, and also acted as an effective windbreak. This cliff was east facing, and provided shade starting from the mid-afternoon (during our afternoon siesta we would all huddle around a shade space of about 5 feet by 5 feet).

My camp setup consisted of an extra large cot, which allowed me to sleep comfortably away from the many scorpions, rattlesnakes, and rodents that also inhabited the camp, and a large outstretched tarp, which allowed me to walk around my corner of the camp barefooted without worrying too much about cactus spines and scorpions. I had a sleeping bag, but didn't make much use of it because on most nights the temperatures rarely dropped below 80 degrees. I used a Coleman Extreme Cooler, guaranteed to keep ice for 5 days. Under the extreme temperatures at the plot, however, I was lucky to keep ice for 3 or 4 days, so for the remaining days I had to be satisfied with warm water and Gatorade. Occasionally, when I just couldn't bear

DESERT TORTOISE PRESERVE COMMITTEE

MEMBERSHIP/DONOR FORM

NAME _____
 ADDRESS _____
 CITY _____
 STATE _____ ZIP _____

DATE _____
 RENEWAL ☐
 NEW ☐

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** and mail to:

DTPC
4067 Mission Inn Avenue
Riverside, CA 92501

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:

drinking warm water or when I wanted milk or other conveniences needing refrigeration, I would venture on the long, bumpy dirt road back to Baker to pick up a couple of extra blocks of ice.

Conducting behavior studies on tortoises involved sitting with an individual tortoise during its entire activity period (from sunrise to sunset) and recording every behavior pattern the animal did on a minute by minute basis. I used categories from a published ethogram (a repertoire of behavior patterns) to describe behaviors and recorded my observations into a digital tape recorder (later that evening I would transcribe my observations to data sheets).

My observation platform consisted of a 5-foot diameter golf umbrella attached to a comfortable lawn chair. Together with a wide brimmed straw hat, long sleeved shirt and pants, dark sun glasses, and SPF 45 sunscreen, I was reasonably protected from the intense ultraviolet radiation beaming down

on me. I have read that in a desert environment with its clear, moisture free skies, approximately 90 percent of the sun's rays reach the ground (only 40 percent of the sun's ray penetrate the atmosphere in other environments). This was always on my mind.

In the evening I would join the other biologists at the base camp to eat dinner and to discuss our day's unique observations. Rachael Woodward often provided us with great meals, while Kemp Anderson mostly ate canned soup—straight from the can without bothering to even heat it up, Kemp's a true desert rat! Occasionally in the evenings, I would lie on my cot before going to sleep and listen to the day's news and traffic (from Los Angeles) with my radio and head phones. It was such a bizarre contrast between being in this utterly remote area—where the only sign of civilization was the soft glow of Las Vegas on the eastern horizon—and the hustle of Los Angeles.



Tortoise Tracks

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4067 MISSION INN AVENUE
RIVERSIDE, CALIFORNIA 92501

Address Service Requested



Sponsored by the Desert Tortoise Preserve Committee (limited space available)

TIME: 8:00 a.m.
LOCATION: DESERT TORTOISE NATURAL AREA
ITEMS TO BRING: Hat, sun screen, day pack, water, lunch, flower books, a hand lens, binoculars. Good walking shoes a must.
FOR RESERVATIONS CALL: Stephanie Pappas at 805-901-8746 or email <csf@att.net>
DESCRIPTION: Kristin H. Berry, Ph.D. will lead a field trip identifying beautiful spring wild flowers at the Desert Tortoise Natural Area. She has been collecting information on flora of the Natural Area for several years. There are over 200 species of flowering plants on the Natural Area. Germination of annual wildflowers occurs when moisture is abundant and with the rains this year the perennial and annual flowers should be abundant and full of color. The flower walk will emphasize plants the desert tortoises eat and shrubs used to provide cover for burrows.
FEE: \$50.00 (members) and \$75.00 (nonmembers) - additional contributions welcomed.



November 5-6, 2005
Desert Tortoise Preserve Committee's
Fall Work Party

April 2-3, 2005
Desert Tortoise Preserve Committee's
Spring Work Party