
Tortoise Tracks

The Desert Tortoise Preserve Committee, Inc.

Spring 2006 26:1



Juvenile Desert Tortoise, June 7, 2005
Desert Tortoise Natural Area Parking Lot
Always remember to check for tortoises beneath your car before driving
off after parking in the desert.
Photograph by Michael J. Connor

DISCOVER TORTOISES AT THE DESERT TORTOISE NATURAL AREA THIS SPRING

For the eighteenth consecutive year, a Desert Tortoise Preserve Committee Naturalist will be on duty at the DTNA to answer questions about the tortoises and other wildlife, and to help visitors appreciate the desert environment.

This season's naturalist is Ed Patrovsky. Ed brings valuable experience to the naturalist position. He is a retired Bureau of Land Management Ranger who spent many years patrolling California's Mojave and

Colorado Deserts.

The Naturalist recommends that visitors bring drinking water, a hat, sunscreen, and sturdy walking shoes to take full advantage of the short self guided nature trails. Optimal time to locate tortoises and other wildlife is from 8-11 A.M. Call (951) 683-3872 to schedule a guided tour or for more information.

The DTNA Naturalist is staffed by the DTPC with support from the Bureau of Land Management.

“MEGADUMP” INITIATIVE THREAT TO DTNA

On February 21, 2006, lawyers acting for Missouri-based Herzog Environmental filed a notice of intent to circulate a petition to gather signatures to place a massive landfill and energy project on the November 6 ballot in Kern County. The landfill would be sited immediately adjacent to the internationally-renowned Desert Tortoise Natural Area. The energy development would be sited near the entrance to picturesque Red Rock Canyon State Park. By going straight to the voters, the project proponents will bypass the usual county planning process.

If approved, the landfill would be the repository for up to 700 truckloads of trash from Los Angeles each day. The landfill would operate seven days a week and have a capacity of 600 million tons of trash. This is a titanic threat -- not just to the DTNA itself -- but to the very future of the desert tortoise and other imperiled species in the western Mojave Desert.

Predatory ravens pose an enormous obstacle to tortoise recovery because they kill baby and young tortoises. The desert is already overpopulated with ravens. Landfills are raven havens, providing a year round food bonanza for these adaptive scavengers. Landfills are an incompatible land use in a conservation area.

In surveys for the West Mojave Plan, biologists found the DTNA to be the only area where young tortoises could be found in any number. Because of this, the DTNA is considered a key to the recovery of the desert tortoise in the entire region. It is the worst possible

Megadump continued on page 2

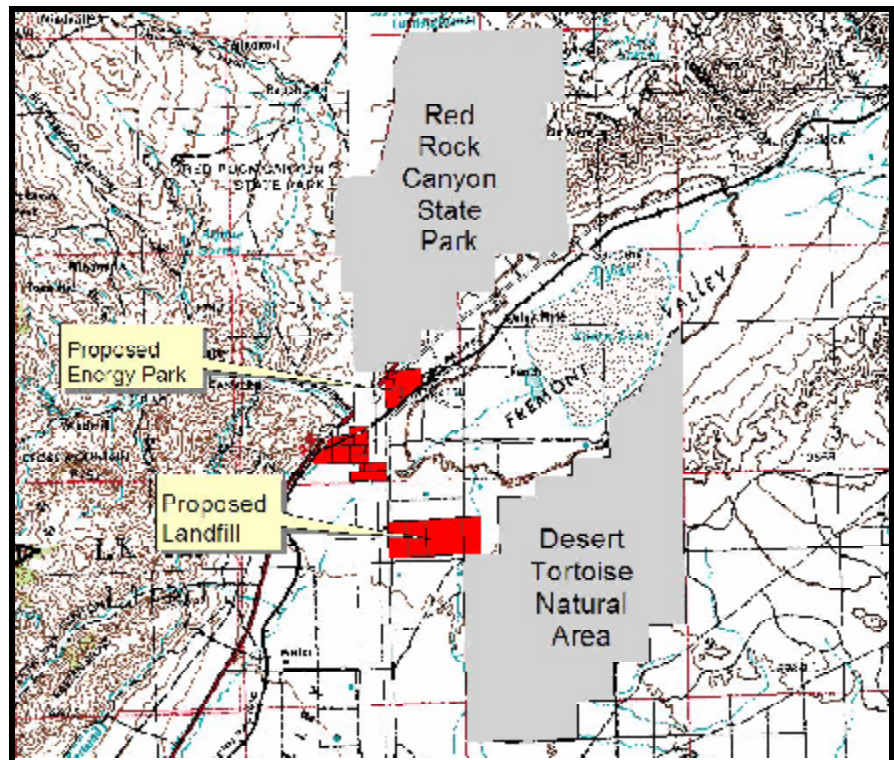
Megadump continued from page 1

location for a raven-attracting trash dump.

In addition to ravens, truck traffic, noise, vibration, dust, smell, pollution of the water table, and the inevitable explosion of other subsidized predators such as rats and coyotes all spell trouble for the tortoise's fragile habitat.

And not just the animals will suffer from the landfill and energy projects. Tourism and local quality of life will take major hits. Consequently, the initiative is opposed by local organizations including Mojave Chamber of Commerce and off-road vehicle groups. Because the initiative is aimed at sidestepping county planning efforts, it is also opposed by a number of local and regional politicians.

Herzog Environmental are attempting to whitewash the establishment of one of the largest landfills in the country by selling the measure as a "green" alternative



Location of the Proposed Landfill Next to the DTNA and Proposed Energy Park South of Red Rock Canyon State Park

NEW DTPC LIFE MEMBERS

Guy B. McInerny
Genny Smith
Robert G. Clement
Denise L. LaBerteaux
Noël O. Dybdal, DVM
CTTC Chino Valley
Chapter

energy park. The measure would also create a foundation to distribute up to \$5 million a year to organizations in Kern County. Similar tactics were used 12 years ago to get the Gregory Canyon landfill approved in north San Diego County. We cannot afford to let this happen here.

All our supporters, especially Kern County and Los Angeles residents, are urged to voice their concerns to local officials. Los Angeles' trash needs to be kept well away from pristine desert tortoise habitat.

WEST MOJAVE PLAN

On March 13, 2006 the Bureau of Land Management signed the Record of Decision for the BLM portion of the West Mojave Plan, culminating a 15 year planning process.

The plan amends the 1980 California Desert Conservation Area Plan. It will allow the DTPC to achieve its long standing goal of retiring the Pilot Knob grazing allotment. Working with the Wildlands Conservancy, the DTPC bought out the rancher and acquired the grazing rights to the 42,000 acre cattle grazing allotment in 1995.



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

The Desert Tortoise Preserve Committee, Inc.

Founded 1974

Executive Director
Michael J. Connor, Ph.D.

Board of Trustees

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

2005 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, research, and education programs. The year 2005 was another outstanding year in the Committee's efforts to further its mission.

Habitat Acquisition and Land Holdings

A. Land Holdings

On December 31, 2005, the DTPC held title to 236 parcels of land encompassing 5,223 acres of desert tortoise habitat. These parcels are located in California in the counties of Kern (4,440 acres), Riverside (80 acres) and San Bernardino (710 acres).

B. 2005 Acquisitions

Kern County:

A total of seventeen parcels (805 acres) were acquired within the Desert Tortoise Natural Area (DTNA) and the DTNA Expansion Area. This includes three parcels of land (32 acres) that were donated to DTPC. The Assessor Parcel Numbers (APN) are:

217-012-17	269-091-02
269-110-02	269-132-03
269-133-01	269-132-04
269-150-08	269-150-07
269-170-07	269-170-08
269-170-12	269-180-14
334-060-22	334-091-02

334-190-03 334-131-03
334-091-03

C. New Habitat Acquisition Agreements Signed in 2005

Los Angeles County:

Agreements signed to acquire a total of 4.2 acres of mitigation lands.

- County of Los Angeles, Lake Los Angeles Park Project - 3 acres;
- Richard Pinehurst Inc.- 1.2 acres.

San Bernardino County:

Agreements signed to acquire a total of 100.6 acres of mitigation lands.

- Horizon Communities - 38 acres;
- Lake Development Group - 3 acres;
- Victorville Village - 25 acres;
- Capital Pacific Homes - 18 acres;
- JSAK Victorville Partnership - 4.8 acres;
- Tandis Homes - 11.8 acres.

Habitat Management & Stewardship

A. Kern County

The DTPC works with the Bureau of Land Management and the State of California to manage and protect the 39.5 square mile Desert Tortoise Natural Area in southeast Kern County. The Committee owns 4,340 acres of desert tortoise critical habitat and manages 240 acres under conservation easement, in and around the DTNA.

In 2005, DTPC personnel

spent 360 hours site visiting and photo-documenting 75 key parcels to assess specific management needs and identify areas in need of clean up and restoration. Other stewardship activities included the spring and fall work parties, and regular fence maintenance.

The Committee recruited and staffed a naturalist at the DTNA during the 2005 spring season to monitor visitors and provide interpretive services.

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 solidify the DTNA expansion proposal. 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.

B. 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 2005 included removal of dangerous structures from Blackwater Well. Permanent retirement of the Pilot Knob grazing allotment is proposed under the BLM's West Mojave Plan.

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 was the first purpose built tortoise crossing in the West Mojave Desert Tortoise Recovery Unit. In 2005, DTPC contracted with Merrill Engineering to work with the County of San Bernardino to finalize completion of the fence.

C. Riverside County

In Riverside County, the Desert Tortoise Preserve Committee currently owns 80 acres of desert tortoise critical habitat in the Chuckwalla Desert Wildlife Management Area.

In 2005, DTPC funded the establishment of the first seedbank for Harwood's milkvetch at Rancho Santa Ana Botanic Gardens. In previous years, DTPC sponsored surveys had found the plant in only a handful of locations. The seedbank will help assure the continued survival of this very rare species.

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 2005, MDDC units were located at:

- California Welcome Center, Tanger Outlet Mall, Barstow;
- Kern County Library, Wanda Kirk Branch, Rosamond.

B. Educational Materials

- Distributed thousands of copies of the DTPC's educational brochures *The Threatened Desert Tortoise* and *The Desert Tortoise Natural Area*.
- Distributed 5,200 copies of the DTPC newsletter *Tortoise Tracks*.

C. Web Site

The DTPC web site at <<http://www.tortoise-tracks.org>> features information on the Mojave Desert, Desert Tortoise Biology, Desert Tortoise conservation, and a virtual tour of the DTNA. The web site caters to large numbers of school students and others researching the desert tortoise. In 2005, the Website was moved to a new host to improve accessibility.

D. Public Policy & Comment

Significant interaction and coordination with government agencies is essential to DTPC's mission because the desert tortoise 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 and the Executive Director hold informal meetings with resource staff on a regular basis.

Comments were submitted to various government agencies on a number of projects that directly impact the desert tortoise. These include:

- Mojave National Preserve Fire Management Plan, Environmental Assessment.
- Protest Of Final Environmental Impact Report and Statement for the West Mojave Plan.
- Desert Tortoise Translocation Plan for Fort Irwin's Land Expansion Program at the U.S. Army National Training Center (NTC) & Fort Irwin.
- Environmental Assessment (EA) to Convert Wells to Guzzlers, Mojave National Preserve.
- Environmental Assessment SD 10-05; Kern County Conditional Use Permit Case 6, Map No. 113; Conditional Use Permit Case 7, Map No. 113; Zone Change Case 2, Map 113; General Plan amendment 1, Map 113; General Plan Amendment 1, Map 114 – (PP06226).

E. Desert Tortoise Natural Area Naturalist Program

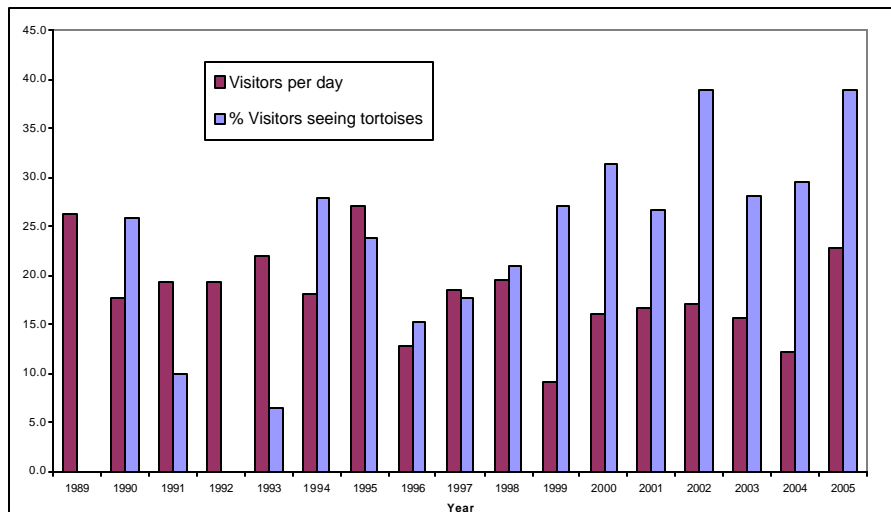
For the seventeenth consecutive year, DTPC staffed a Naturalist at the DTNA Interpretive

Center, and had a naturalist on duty for 74 days from March 16, 2005 to June 7, 2005.

The naturalist recorded 1,686 visitors in 594 visitor groups. A record 39% of visitors saw at least 1 tortoise; and 11% of the visitors saw more than one tortoise.

F. Environmental Presentations & Outreach

DTPC staff and volunteers gave 9 educational presentations to Turtle and Tortoise Club groups and others, and participated in a number of public and government agency meetings.



Daily visitation to the Desert Tortoise Natural Area and number of visitors seeing tortoises during the spring season from 1989 to 2005

Research

A. Mohave Ground Squirrel Status

In spring 2005, DTPC contracted with Dr. Phil Leitner to sample state-threatened Mohave ground squirrels at the DTNA for an ongoing genetic study. The DTPC also received 2 final reports from Dr. Leitner of surveys conducted in prior years: *Trapping Survey For The Mohave Ground Squirrel In The DTNA Eastern Expansion Area 2003*; and, *Mohave Ground Squirrel Trapping Survey In The Region Between U.S. Highway 395 And The Mojave River, San Bernardino County Spring 2004*.

Grants

A. WHIP Grant

The DTPC was awarded a Wildlife Habitat Incentive Program grant by the Natural Resource Conservation Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture. This cost sharing grant, provides \$42,000 for protective fencing and

restoration at the former "Camp C" site.

Defenders Of Wildlife provided a grant of \$6,000 match to match the fencing portion of the WHIP grant.

B. Desert Tortoise Council Grant

The Desert Tortoise Council (DTC) provided a grant of \$10,000 to support DTPC/DTC joint conservation activities by the DTPC's Executive Director.

Volunteerism

Volunteers devoted 2,544 hours of time to the DTPC in the 2005. Volunteer activities included land stewardship, board activities, making presentations, product sales, research, and work parties.

Board Of Trustees

The DTPC's Board of Trustees manages the Committee's affairs, sets goals, and appoints staff and subcommittees. Elections to the Board were held at the Annual

General Meeting in January 2005. The following individuals served on the Board of Trustees in 2005:

Kim Clark (resigned May, 2005)
Mark Hagan, President
Stephanie Pappas, Vice President
Laura Stockton, Treasurer
Mark Massar, Secretary
Kristin Berry

The Desert Tortoise Preserve Committee's successes in 2005 would not be possible without the contributions and help of our many supporters. Thank you all for supporting our efforts to promote the welfare of the wild desert tortoise.

Michael J. Connor, Ph.D.
Executive Director

This Annual Report is published in the DTPC's quarterly newsletter *Tortoise Tracks* and is made available to the public on our Website at:

<<http://www.tortoise-tracks.org>>.

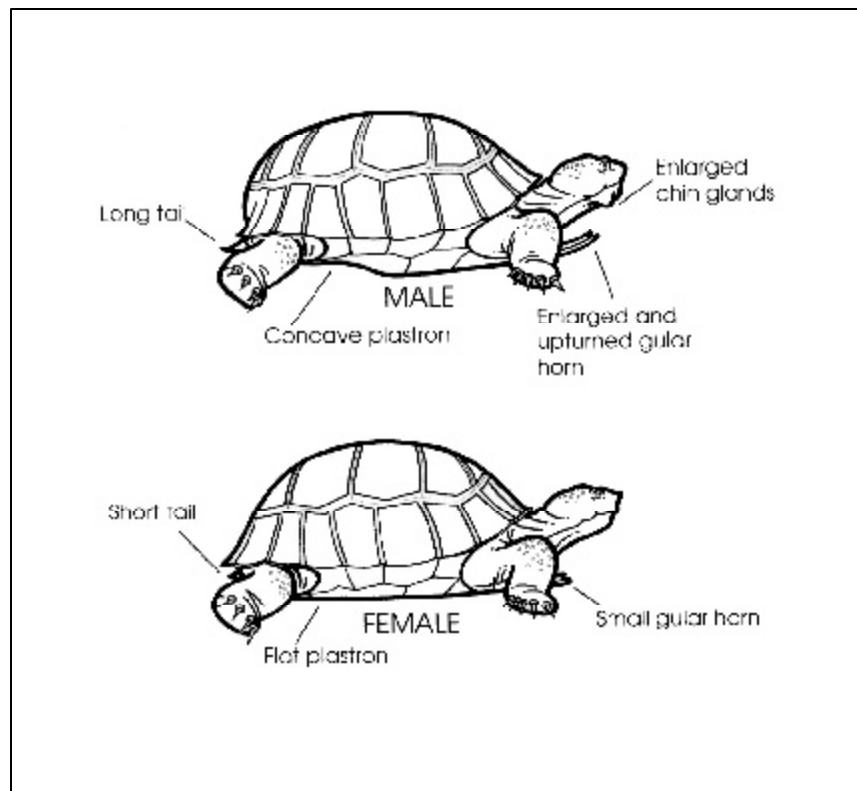
Natural History Notes

Both male and female desert tortoises have subdentary glands—more commonly known as chin glands—which are paired glands located below the mandibles. These glands are found in the three other extant *Gopherus* species as well.

Several factors indicate that these glands play important roles in courtship and social status. They are inactive until sexual maturity is reached and they become especially enlarged in the males during the breeding season in late summer, early fall.

Socially dominant males generally have larger chin glands than subdominant males, and there is a positive correlation between levels of testosterone and the size of the chin glands. Because of their larger chin glands, dominant males may produce chemical signals that last longer and transmit further than subdominant males.

It has been suggested that one function of the frequent head bobbing male tortoises do when they encounter each other is to aid in the dispersion of chemical signals from their chin glands. During courtship of the gopher tortoise, males will sometimes wipe the chin gland over an enlarged scale on the forelimb and will present this to the female. Behavioral studies and chemical studies



indicate that chin gland secretions may be used by tortoises to identify the sex and individual identity of other tortoises in their social group.

This ability to distinguish individual males may facilitate mate choice by females. For example, females can remain inside their burrows until they have determined the identity of visiting suitors. In one study, females were less likely to investigate the chin gland secretions of unfamiliar males than familiar males.

Enlarged chin glands may also function as a visual signal. Interacting male tortoises characteristically hold their heads upward, making the glands more prominently exposed.

Spring Work Party April 5-6, 2006

A DTPC work party provides a wonderful opportunity to become intimately acquainted with desert tortoise habitat. Tasks for this spring's work party include fence signing, trail maintenance and trash removal at the DTNA, and final clean up at Pilot Knob. Work Party attendees staying for both days will be able to enjoy the traditional camp out at Blackwater Well.

If you are interested in joining the work party on one or both days, please register by calling Michael Connor at (951) 683-3872 or sending an e-mail to <dtpc@pacbell.net>.

Visit the DTPC Website for more information:
www.tortoise-tracks.org

DESERT TORTOISE PRESERVE COMMITTEE

MEMBERSHIP/DONOR FORM

NAME _____
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 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:

HARWOOD'S MILKVETCH SEEDBANK



In 2005, DTPC helped establish the world's first seedbank for Harwood's milkvetch, *Astragalus insularis Harwoodii*, at Rancho Santa Ana Botanic Gardens.

DTPC became involved in conserving this rare plant through its work in the Chuckwalla Desert Wildlife Manage-

ment Area. DTPC has been acquiring desert tortoise habitat there with mitigation funds required by the California Energy Commission for the licensing of a power plant in Blythe. The power plant also impacted one of the few known locations for Harwood's milkvetch. In 2003, DTPC contracted with botanist David Magney to survey the Chuckwalla Bench and previously known localities for Harwood's milkvetch in an attempt to locate Harwood milkvetch habitat. Although the survey successfully located plants in a number of locations these were all on public land.

In the interests of conserving the plant, DTPC made the decision to establish a seedbank for

the milkvetch at Rancho Santa Ana Botanic Gardens.

Under the able direction of Seed Curator Michael Wall, Rancho Santa Ana Botanic Gardens is collecting and maintaining viable conservation seed collections from populations within California referenced in David Magney's report of his 2003 Harwood Milkvetch Surveys.

Rancho Santa Ana Botanic Gardens will sample all existing populations as well as any new populations to maintain a viable seed collection of approximately 2,500 seeds from each. To hedge against catastrophe, an assurance bank of Harwood's milkvetch seeds will be established in Colorado.



Tortoise Tracks

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October 28-29, 2006
Desert Tortoise Preserve Committee's
Fall Work Party

April 1-2, 2006
Desert Tortoise Preserve Committee's
Spring Work Party

DTPC CALENDAR OF EVENTS
