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# Tortoise Tracks

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The Desert Tortoise Preserve Committee, Inc.

Spring 2009 29:1

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## 34<sup>th</sup> Annual Desert Tortoise Preserve Committee Meeting and Banquet

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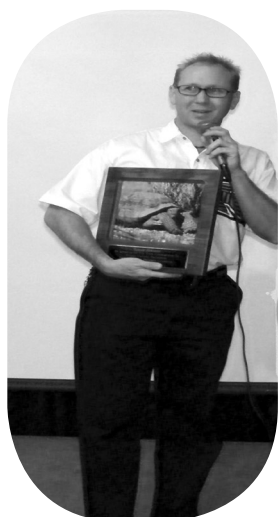
This year the Desert Tortoise Preserve Committee (Committee) hosted its 34<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting and Banquet. Each January the Committee invites all members, interested public, colleagues, and state and federal agencies to join us for the informative and entertaining event.

The business meeting began with welcomes and introductions of individuals from the California Turtle and Tortoise Club's (CTTC) High Desert Chapter, the Bureau of Land Management's (BLM) Ridgecrest Field Office, the Red Rock Canyon Interpretive Association, and the Los Angeles Fish and Game Commission. Committee Treasurer Laura Stockton gave a summary of the Committee's finances in 2008. Preserve Manager Melissa Nicholson discussed the Committee's major accomplishments in 2008 including grant awards, educational outreach performed, fencing projects, and the on-going restoration projects at Camp C. She also discussed the Committee's goals for the upcoming year. Contract attorney Jun Lee summarized the Committee's acquisition of more than 400 acres of land. Approximately 30 acres of habitat were acquired to enlarge the Desert Tortoise Natural Research Area in Kern County. Four hundred acres of land were acquired in San Bernardino County to preserve the unique habitat at Harper Dry Lake. A period for open discussion and comments followed the formal presentations.

Following the afternoon meeting and discussion, banquet attendees arrived for the evening event which began with a social hour. Committee Board members mingled with arriving guest, many of whom they hadn't seen since last year's banquet. After a delicious meal, banquet guests readied themselves to hear from the invited speaker, Mr. Taylor Edwards.

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Taylor Edwards earned a B.A. in Zoology from the University of California at Santa Barbara and a M.S. in Wildlife Ecology from the University of Arizona, School of Natural Resources. He currently works to elucidate gene flow for genealogical DNA testing at the Human Origin Genotyping Laboratory, including public testing for National Geographic's

Genographic Project. Mr. Edwards' area of expertise is herpetology, most specifically tortoises. His talk, "Defining the Desert Tortoise with DNA; Applications of Biotechnology to Tortoise Conservation" focused on the latest research using DNA. By applying the same techniques used by forensic scientist Mr. Edwards uses DNA technology to elucidate the effects of habitat fragmentation on desert tortoise populations, make comments on the Draft Desert Tortoise Recovery Plan, track translocations of tortoises by humans, and identify the genetic origins of pet tortoises.

Taylor Edwards was awarded a large photo plaque for his research and efforts to conserve distinct populations of desert tortoises.



Former Committee President Mark Hagan was awarded the Tortoise Tracker Walking Stick for his efforts to conserve the desert tortoise and his outstanding service to the Committee over the years. The Committee hopes the walking stick will see Mr. Hagan through many journeys to the desert.

Biologist Tom Egan, long time Committee member and active member of the Desert Tortoise Council, was awarded a large photo plaque to honor his conservation efforts.



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

### The Desert Tortoise Preserve Committee, Inc. Founded 1974

Preserve Manager and Office Administrator  
 Melissa Nicholson

#### Board of Trustees

President	Stephanie Pappas
1st Vice President	Mark Hagan
2nd Vice President	Jane McEwan
3rd Vice President	Mark Bratton
Treasurer	Laura Stockton
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Board Member	Kristin Berry, Ph.D.



Robert Parker, who recently retired from the BLM Ridgecrest Field Office, was also awarded a large photo plaque. Mr. Parker has been instrumental in Committee activities at the Desert Tortoise Natural Area for years, including active participation at our annual work parties. Now that he has retired we look forward to working with Mr. Parker in his new role as a volunteer.

Although unable to attend, Tonya Moore and Scott Harris of the California Department of Fish and Game (CDFG) and Ron Gartland, formerly of the BLM, were also honored with awards. Each of these individuals has been instrumental in providing guidance, technical analyses, and review of documents or projects aimed at the recovery of the desert tortoise. We are sorry that these individuals were unable to accept their awards in person.

## Big Bucks Spent on Desert Tortoise Protection

According to a 2006 annual species-by-species expenditure report \$884 million were spent on the more than 1,100 species protected by the Endangered Species Act in the last 11 years. The top recipients of funding have been the Pacific Salmon in the Pacific Northwest and the Steller sea lion. The Mojave desert tortoise was on the receiving end of more than \$93 million in recovery funds from 1996 to 2006, making it one of the country's most expensive land-dwelling species and more costly than the grizzly bear, gray wolf, or bald eagle.

The money, spent by state and federal agencies, is aimed at reviving species from the brink of extinction. Many animals are threatened by highways, urbanization, invasive species, off-highway vehicles, disease, human subsidized predators, wildfires, and climate change. Protected Mojave desert tortoise habitat spreads across 9,600 square miles, four state parks, seven military installations, four national parks, and scores of federal, state, and county agencies. Desert tortoises in Southwest Utah were listed as threatened in 1980. That designation was expanded to the rest of the Mojave desert tortoise's range in 1990. Since then, millions of dollars have been spent on monitoring, construction of fences along highways, disease studies, and the development of long-range plans intended to ensure the long term survival of the species.

The tortoise's slow rate of reproduction makes recovery efforts difficult to assess and some populations have declined dramatically. To qualify as recovered, a species' population must increase or hold steady for 25 years. "We really haven't given the tortoise enough time to know whether we've done any good or not," said Roy Averill-Murray, Desert Tortoise Recovery Coordinator for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in Reno, Nevada. Wildlife advocates insist that the tortoise is a worthy recipient of funding because of the species' highly symbolic and biological value. "Nobody thought it was going to be an inexpensive proposition," said Ileene Anderson, a biologist for the Center for Biological Diversity. "But the desert tortoise is a bellwether species for the health of our desert."

(Rewrite Source, Associated Press, Mark Stark, February 1, 2009)

Remember this photo from our most recent issue of Tortoise Tracks? These students from Lancaster High School volunteered at the Fall Work Party. Find out what other activities are keeping them busy!



Kandace Romero, Dayshel Atkins, and Sergio Gutierrez  
photos by Glen Baumbach

## TortoiseTracks "The Movie" Wins in NCSE National Video Competition By Glen Baumbach & Corinne Cowan

It seems that all good stories will eventually become a movie. Lancaster High School students transformed the latest issue of Tortoise Tracks, the newsletter, into Tortoise Tracks "The Movie". Filmmakers, Eena Singh, Corrine Cowan, Katelyn Louton, Cris Molina, Alex Munney, Dayshel Atkins and Brad Voracek, won the age 15-18 category in a video contest from the National Council for Science and the Environment (NCSE).

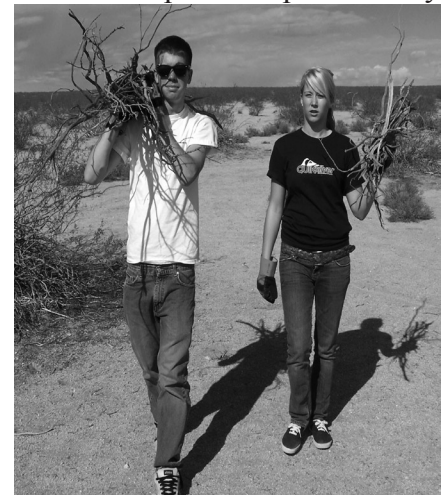
The video was entered into a national competition entitled "*Voices and Visions from the Next Generation of Conservationists*". It features an interview with Dr. Ken Nagy and also a tour of the Tortoise Head Start program on Edwards Air Base, hosted by Mark Bratton. In addition, there are scenes from the Fall Work Party where over thirty Lancaster High students showed up to lend their, eager, helping hands.

Their 5-minute film was shown during the 9<sup>th</sup> Annual Conference, "Biodiversity in a Rapidly Changing World" in Washington, DC in December 2008. It was shown on the main screen and on laptops throughout the room. It can currently be viewed on the NCSE website (<http://ncseonline.org/Conference/Biodiversity/>) and will be showcased

at the 2009 DC Environmental Film Festival. Complete information is available on their website (<http://www.dcenvironmentalfilmfest.org/films.php?FilmID=359>).

The club members comprised of AP Environmental Science students, robotics team members, AVID biology students, and even a few dancers enjoyed the opportunity to get out of the classroom to make their footprint in this world a helpful and ecologically friendly one. They spent the day collecting creosote seeds, gathering twigs, and digging holes in the desert floor to install vertical mulch bundles in efforts to restore tortoise habitat.

No matter the prize these young adults are nowhere near finished. Recently they have been trying to discover new ways that they can help the environment. A group of five students, known as the QuikScience Team, have entered a competition sponsored by



Alex Munney & Kaley Thacker the University of Southern California and the Wrigley Oceanographic Institute. They have been seen outside of grocery stores asking shoppers

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## Off-Highway Vehicle Grant Program

### GREEN OR RED STICKERS

If you operate an off-highway vehicle (OHV) in the state of California you must have either a Green sticker or a Red sticker issued by the Department of Motor Vehicles. Green stickers allow vehicles to operate on public land all year. Red stickers are similar to the Green Sticker except that red stickered vehicles can only be operated during certain times of the year due according to the emission standards established by the California Air Resources Board. This year \$27.1 million in funding generated by the sale of these stickers will be available to grant applicants. Funds will be distributed among four categories: Education and Safety, Law Enforcement, Operations and Maintenance, and Restoration.

### PRELIMINARY APPLICATION REVIEW

All preliminary applications for funding support from the Off-Highway Vehicle Motor Vehicle Recreation (OHVMR) Division of the California State Parks system were due on March 2, 2009. The 30-day public review and comment period for the 2008/09 Grants and Cooperative Agreement Program began March 3, 2009, and ends April 6, 2009. This period provides an opportunity for the public to review the preliminary applications submitted to the OHVMR Division for consideration during the current grant cycle. The public may provide comment to both the applicant and the OHVMR Division by emailing the contact person listed on the preliminary application and copying the OHVMR Division at <OHVinfo@parks.ca.gov>.

### PRESERVE COMMITTEE APPLICATION

The DTPC has submitted an application for support funding. Please take the time to visit <http://ohv.parks.ca.gov> to review and make comment on our application and projects submitted by other applicants including other non-profits, cities, counties, districts, federal agencies, state agencies, educational institutions, and Native America Tribes. This public review process is critical to developing high quality, well-reviewed projects to ensure this funding is put to its very best use.

## In Memory of William Stookey

*In the fall of 2008 the Desert Tortoise Preserve Committee, the California Turtle and Tortoise Club, and the the desert tortoise lost a dear friend when William Stookey passed away. William Stookey left behind his wife, Betty Stookey, and two children.*

*William was a school boy in Michigan and a transplant to California. He attended the California Institute of Technology in the 1940s and met the love of his life, Betty, on New Year's Eve in 1944. William continued his education at the prestigious MIT. Throughout his life William was active in 4-H activities and particularly enjoyed raising geese and wild turkeys.*

*No matter his home address, William continued to support the animals and communities he loved. Mr. Stookey contributed generously to the Marshall Community Fund in Marshall, Michigan.*

*William Stookey's attention was first drawn to the desert tortoise when he worked as an engineer for the first transmission lines along Highway 395 in the high Mojave Desert. In those days he and the other men working the line would see tortoises everywhere they looked. In those days it was very common for the tortoises to be taken home as a new pet for the family.*

*Over the years William noticed fewer and fewer tortoises during each of his sojourns into the Mojave. That is when the Stookey family became involved with desert tortoise on a whole new level. Phone calls were made, tortoises were adopted, and generous donations were given.*

*There are many of us who will miss William Stookey, but he will be remembered by those of us working with the tortoise as a dear friend.*

## ***Mojave Desert Spring Wildflower Walk***

***Led by Dr. Kristin Berry***



LOCATION: Desert Tortoise Natural Area, Kern Co., California

TIME: 9:00 a.m.

ITEMS TO BRING: hat, sunscreen, day pack, water, lunch, plant identification guides, a hand lens, binoculars. Good walking shoes a must.

FOR RESERVATIONS: Call (951) 683-3872 or e-mail <dtpc@pacbell.net>.

DESCRIPTION: There are more than 200 species of plants at the Natural Area. The walk will emphasize plants eaten by the desert tortoise

and shrubs used to provide cover for burrows.



FEE: \$20 (members) \$25 (non-members)

Photos by Jane McEwan

## **Special thanks to the following for their contributions to the DTPC:**

Ginger & Gary Wilfong  
Nancy Swenson & Kenneth Topka  
David Sandoval  
Nicholas Cates  
Katherine Anderson & Gary Dunks  
Karl Switak  
Kern Audubon Society  
Dr. Richard & Mrs. Myrna Kettler  
Dan Ludlow  
Mr. & Mrs. Joseph Herron  
Joanne Nissen  
Anne Sullivan  
Horatio Cogswell  
Hermosa Garden Club  
Dr. Tina Peak  
Ed Bradley  
Tom Egan  
Teresa Mendelson  
Roger Harmon

## **Donations were made in the name of:**

Don Williams, Kern Co. Chapter of the  
California Turtle & Tortoise Club  
and

Stephanie Pappas, President of the  
Desert Tortoise Preserve Committee

## **Special Thanks to our newest volunteers:**

Steven Orr & Christopher Cho

## DESERT TORTOISE PRESERVE COMMITTEE

## MEMBERSHIP/DONOR FORM

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 RENEWAL ☐  
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Individual membership \$ 15 annually [ ]  
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Membership Dues \$ \_\_\_\_\_  
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## DONATION ONLY

Enclosed is my donation of \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Please make checks payable to DTPC and mail to:

DTPC  
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 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:

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to participate in surveys to collect public opinion data, as well as educating them about the garbage patch (plastics) in the ocean. Many shoppers were eager to learn what they could do to help.

These young adults have hit the ground running with no intentions of looking back. Future plans to edit an extended version of their video "Tortoise Tracks- "The Movie" is in the works this spring. The Lancaster students want to make it available to anyone interested in tortoise preservation. You can contact us if you would like to order a copy of the extended version and information will be sent to you. Make sure to keep your eyes open for any such activities and plan on seeing these dedicated kids back in the spring for yet another day in the dirt.

## Calendar of Events

More information about each events can be found by calling (951) 683-3872 or e-mailing [dtpc@pacbell.net](mailto:dtpc@pacbell.net)

March 3rd: Public Review of the Off-Road Vehicle Green Sticker Grant Application begins.

March 13th: An Interpretive Naturalist will be stationed at the DTNA until the first week of June.

March 28th & 29th: The Desert Tortoise Preserve Committee's Annual Spring Work Party.

April 4th: Spring Wildflower Walk led by Dr. Kristin Berry at the Desert Tortoise Research Natural Area.



## Tortoise Tracks

THE DESERT TORTOISE PRESERVE COMMITTEE  
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**JOIN US!!**  
**DTPC's Annual**  
**Spring Work Party**  
**March 28-29, 2009**  
*If you are interested in attending  
on one or both days please register  
by calling (951) 683-3872 or e-mail  
[dtpc@pacbell.net](mailto:dtpc@pacbell.net)*