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# Tortoise Tracks

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The Desert Tortoise Preserve Committee, Inc.

Winter 2010 30:4

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## Flowers for Rocky

Article and Photography by Jane McEwan

My eighth grade algebra teacher, Rocky Gardner, died this year. He was one of my best teachers. I was lucky enough to get to know him again when I moved back to Ridgecrest nine years ago. Rocky liked to tell stories about two tortoises he'd had since the mid sixties; especially about how the male tortoise chased his little Shi Szu around the yard when the dog stole the tortoise's romaine lettuce. Rocky's tortoises were impressive, good-sized adults and, when Rocky died, I offered to find a home for them. I was disappointed when someone else beat me to it. Then, much to my surprise, his sister brought me a tiny hatchling she found in Rocky's backyard. Suddenly, I had a very small dependent, who like any infant requires much more care than an adult and a longer commitment. First of all, I couldn't take Rocky home for fear my dog would hurt him: So now "Rocky" lives in a sandbox in the corner of my law office. Since I primarily do estate planning, it isn't too odd to have this small legacy from a friend in my office.

I've wondered about my responsibility as guardian of this



minor. I've taken on the care for an animal who could outlive me-if I can meet its needs. Fortunately my office landlord isn't too conscientious about the landscaping; and there are plenty of dandelions in the lawn edging the parking lot. Every day, I pick dandelions on the way into my office: Flowers are Rocky's favorite. So far his needs aren't too expensive, although the full spectrum UV light cost more than I'd expected. I also have to plan ahead and be sure he's looked after when I'm gone. Recently I was at an Elder Law conference in San Diego and was alarmed when I saw my paralegal had called on a Saturday afternoon.

I called back immediately, only to find out she was just wondering if Rocky needed his dandelions. Since my secretary had already offered to stop by, Rocky was already well cared for.

Still if you make a commitment you need to plan ahead, whether for spouses and children or for pets. Occasionally I have clients who want to set up trusts for their pets. Pet trusts have been enforceable in California since a new law became effective in 2008. Usually these "companion animal trusts" have been for dogs or horses. So far, no one has asked me to set one up for their desert tortoise; but

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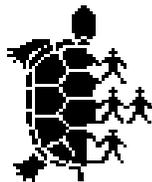
it seems even more important for such long-lived animals. Once you start to care, it's hard to stop; and it's natural to want to ensure that "loved ones" are cared for. After all, we protect what we care about.

The Desert Tortoise Preserve Committee's mission is to promote the welfare of the desert tortoise in its native wild state, which is not the same as caring for domestic tortoises. Yet the DTPC has a similar, yet much greater, commitment to care for the land it has acquired for the desert tortoise. The essential difference lies in protecting natural habitat. To accomplish that, the DTPC has acquired land suitable for the Desert Tortoise, as well as the Mohave Ground Squirrel and Burrowing Owl. Land has been purchased from donations from members and with mitigation funds from developers. Mitigation funds also include a portion for habitat restoration and protection. However the cost of fencing today far exceeds the amount estimated when the mitigation plans were made. As a result the DTPC needs donations for stewardship, rather

than just funds restricted to purchasing land. So if you are considering year-end tax deductible giving or planning your estate, and you have enough to provide for your loved ones- whether two-legged or four- please consider a donation that will help the Desert Tortoise Preserve Committee meet its commitments to protect habitat for the desert tortoise.

Special thanks to the following volunteers:

Dr. Kristin Berry  
 Mark Massar  
 Chuck Hemingway  
 Jun Lee  
 Glen Baumbach  
 Lancaster High School Staff and Students  
 Pat Sorenson  
 Hector Villalobos  
 Carrie Woods  
 Ruby Allen  
 Shelley Ellis  
 Charlie Massieon  
 Laura Mogg  
 Mark Bratton  
 Dave Zantiny  
 Laura Stockton  
 Jane McEwan  
 Steve and Marlene Ishii



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



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### The Desert Tortoise Preserve Committee, Inc.

Founded 1974

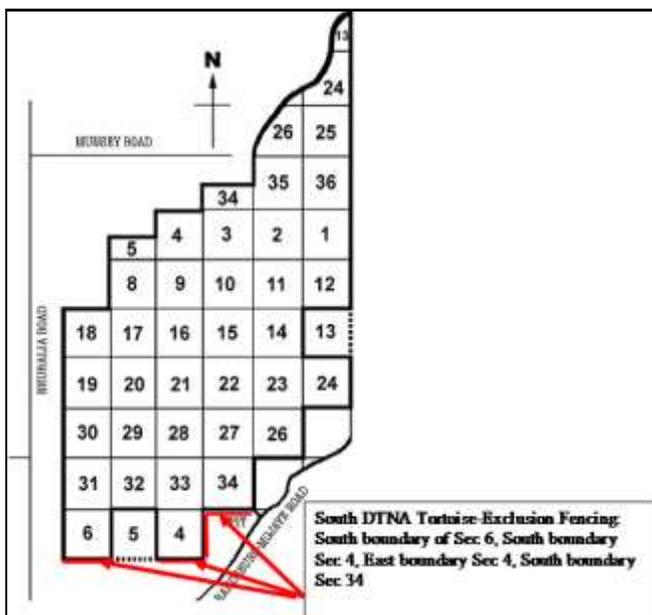
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## Six Miles of Tortoise-Exclusion Fencing Improvements Installed at DTNA

Article by Jun Lee

In November, the Desert Tortoise Preserve Committee, drawing on a grant from the California Department of Parks and Recreation, Off-highway Vehicle Division, completed four miles of protective fencing to prevent tortoises from being killed along dirt roads at the Natural Area boundaries. The fenced area is along the southern and southeastern boundaries of the Natural Area in areas considered to be high risk to the tortoises that travel outside the fence (see attached map). The adjacent roads lands are used by vehicle-oriented recreationists and other travelers and the adjacent lands are privately owned. The project involved retrofitting the existing hog-wire fence perimeter fence that protects the DTNA with 36 inch wide tortoise-exclusion mesh.



“We installed tortoise-exclusion fencing at high vehicle traffic areas to minimize conflicts between wildlife and off-highway vehicle recreationists,” said the project coordinator Jun Lee.

By the end of December, the Committee anticipates completing two more miles of similar fencing along the northern boundaries of the Natural Area, near Koehn Dry Lake. The fence improvements protect tortoises from vehicles that travel along the perimeter of the DTNA.



Photo by Jun Lee

The Committee’s 6 mile tortoise-exclusion fencing project cost about \$225,000 and was made possible by a 76% cash grant from the California Department of Parks and Recreation and 24% matching funds from membership support and mitigation fees received through the California Department of Fish and Game’s incidental take permit program.

“This project was completed through both the Thanksgiving and Christmas holidays,” Jun Lee observed, “mainly due to the extraordinary cooperation of Hector Villalobos, Carrie Woods, and Shelley Ellis of the Bureau of Land Management’s Ridgecrest Office and Martha Ibarra of the California Off-Highway Motor Vehicle Division.”

When you next visit the Natural Area, please look at this new exclusionary fencing designed to reduce injury, mortality, and illegal collections of tortoises.



Photo by Jun Lee

The Desert Tortoise Preserve Committee  
Invites You to Join Us At Our  
*36th Annual Banquet and General Meeting*  
January 22, 2011

The DTCP's Annual Meeting and Banquet will be held Saturday, January 22, 2011 at The Palmdale Hotel, 300 W. Palmdale Blvd., Palmdale, California 93551 (661-878-9475). The afternoon Annual Meeting will feature a review of the Committee's ongoing programs and activities and plans for 2011. Speakers from a variety of agencies will give updates on important activities throughout southern California. The Banquet speaker will be Dr. Cameron Barrows and the program title is *Climate Change and Potential Impacts to the Desert Tortoise: Results of a Modeled Scenario for Joshua Tree National Park*.

PROGRAM

- Annual Meeting                      2:00 to 5:00 P.M.
- Social Mixer                            5:00 to 6:00 P.M.
- Banquet Event                         6:00 to 9:00 P.M.

Dr. Barrows will discuss the warming trend and predicting negative impacts to biodiversity at sites such as Joshua Tree National Park using niche modeling. The resulting predictions may assist managers in making informed choices about potential management options that might reduce the magnitude of biodiversity loss. Joshua Tree National Park is an ideal site to study early impacts of climate change in the desert because it straddles the Mojave-Sonoran Desert interface. Dr. Barrows notes that desert tortoises are among the important and iconic faunal components of the park. He will address such questions as: How sensitive are tortoises to climatic shifts? **Are there aspects of a tortoises' diet or other natural history traits that might result in** being more or less impacted by climate change? How will the current distribution of tortoises shift in response to these changes? The models identified climate refugia where there tortoises may be able to sustain populations, as well as key zones of connectivity to areas outside the park where tortoise populations might continue to thrive.

**To RSVP or For Additional Information**

Call (661) 943-3118 or Email: [dtpc@pacbell.net](mailto:dtpc@pacbell.net)

- \$ \_\_\_\_\_ Dinner Reservation \$35.00  
 \$ \_\_\_\_\_ Optional tax-deductible donation  
 \$ \_\_\_\_\_ Total of my enclosed check

Name(s): \_\_\_\_\_ Phone Number: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_ E-Mail: \_\_\_\_\_

City: \_\_\_\_\_ State: \_\_\_\_\_ Zip: \_\_\_\_\_

Organizational Affiliation (if any): \_\_\_\_\_

Make check payable to: DTPC, 4067 Mission Inn Avenue, Riverside, CA 92501

## 36th Annual Banquet Guest Speaker



Dr. Cameron Barrows will be the Dinner Speaker at the Annual Meeting. He is an Assistant Research Ecologist who coordinates desert research initiatives for the University of California Riverside's Center for Conservation Biology. The focus of his research ranges from the sensitivity of desert plants and animals to predicted levels of climate change, the influence of suburban-natural area interfaces, the influence of exotic species on natural community composition, and drivers of population dynamics. He has spent many years working on the Coachella fringe-toed lizard, flat-tailed horned lizard, and more recently has been modeling potential effects of climate change on desert



Banquet Map



These beautiful block print pillows by Carol Wilcher of Ridgecrest will be raffled at the upcoming DTPC 36th Annual Banquet on January 22, 2011. We welcome artwork contributions for the raffle. If you are interested in making a donation, send an email to [dtpc@pacbell.net](mailto:dtpc@pacbell.net)

## Calendar of Events

January 22, 2011: The Desert Tortoise Preserve Committee, Inc. will host our 36th Annual Meeting and Banquet at the Palmdale Hotel in Palmdale, California. For more information or for advanced registration please email [dtpc@pacbell.net](mailto:dtpc@pacbell.net) or call (661) 878-9475.

February 8-12, 2011: The Annual Meeting of the Western section of the Wildlife Society, will be held in Riverside, California. For more information visit the organization's website [www.tws-west.org](http://www.tws-west.org).

February 18-20, 2011: The 36th Annual Symposium of the Desert Tortoise Council will be held February 18-20, 2011 at Sam's Town in Las Vegas, Nevada. Visit DTC's website [www.deserttortoise.org](http://www.deserttortoise.org) for registration information and details for this event.

March 2011: Information on the Desert Tortoise Preserve Committee's Spring Work Party will be announced soon. Details will be posted on the DTPC website ([www.tortoisetracks.org](http://www.tortoisetracks.org)) and Facebook ([www.facebook.com/dtpc.inc](http://www.facebook.com/dtpc.inc)).

# Joshua Trees

Article and Photography by Mark Bratton

One of the most unusual plants you will see in the Mojave Desert is the Joshua tree (*Yucca brevifolia*). Did you know the Joshua tree is not a true tree? Scientists previously classified the Joshua tree in the Lily family. However, new research indicated that the Joshua tree is more closely related to the agave (agavaceae) family. Scientists identified two subspecies of Joshua Trees, *Yucca brevifolia* ssp. *jaegeriana* and *Yucca brevifolia* ssp. *herbertii*. This distinctive plant was named by early Mormon settlers who thought the tree resembled the Old Testament prophet, Joshua, with upraised arms waving them on to the "Promised Land." Joshua trees have also been called a "Dr. Seuss tree" because of the unusual shapes that the branches make. Joshua trees currently have no special status federally. Although, some desert cities have certain ordinances that protect these unusual plants. There is even a National Park named after it, *Joshua Tree National Park*.

Joshua trees are typically found between elevations of 2,000 to 6,000 feet (Somerville) and are endemic to the Mojave Desert. These rare plants can grow to be between 15 to 40 feet in height and can be found in California, Nevada, Arizona and a small part of Utah. Botanists believe Joshua trees can live up to 800 to 1,000 years (Grossard 1992). However, unlike normal trees, Joshua trees do not have growth rings and cannot be aged by counting the number of rings.

Another interesting fact about Joshua trees is that they are pollinated by only one animal - the Yucca moth. Without the yucca moth, pollination in Joshua trees would not occur. After pollination, fruit and seed pods develop. The seed pods of the Joshua tree are also unusual. The seeds are stacked horizontally within the pods, like poker chips in a case. Once the seed pod opens, the seeds are dispersed by the wind and wildlife.

The Joshua tree is also used for food, shelter, and shade by wildlife. Specifically, birds like ravens



(*Corvus corax*) and red tailed hawks (*Buteo ja-maicensis*) make their nests in Joshua trees. Reptiles like desert spiny (*Sceloporus magister*) and night lizards (*Xantusia vigilis*) use them as shelter. Mammals, such as the desert wood rats (*Neotoma lepida*) and the Black tailed Jackrabbit (*Lepus cali-fornicus*) use the Joshua tree as food sources. Also, the desert tortoise (*Gopherus agassizii*) uses the shade of a Joshua tree for relief from the scorching sun.

The Joshua tree is truly a unique plant to the Mojave Desert and serves the needs of many desert creatures.

#### References:

- Gossard G. (1992). *The Joshua Tree, A Controversial, Contradictory Desert Centurion*.  
Somerville, Graeme (1999). *The Biogeography of The Joshua Tree*. *Geography* 316

## Fall Revegetation Work at Camp C Completed

Article by Laura Stockton

Revegetation efforts began in 2007 on the extremely degraded 31.72 acres northeast of the DTNA. The property acquired from California City is part of Camp C, a site used by Off-Highway vehicle campers for many years. By 2009 the DTPC completed treatment on 15 acres with the construction of catchments and vertical and horizontal mulches. The techniques have been established and refined during the project in consultation with Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS). The NRCS administers the Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP) grant that has provided most of the funds for this project.

During October and early November, 2010 crews from the American Conservation Experience (ACE) constructed vertical and horizontal

mulches on the remaining 16.72 acres. Long-time volunteer, Chuck Hemingway, was onsite most days of the six weeks that ACE worked to facilitate the project. On December 7th Cindy Montepagano of NRCS gave final approval of the work on the 15 acres required to be completed by 2010 for the WHIP grant. She was pleased that mulches and catchments constructed in 2007 and 2009 have increased annual vegetation in and around them and show increased rodent activity.

Current ongoing work includes establishing monitoring sites; placing shrub seeds in and around mulches; adding vertical and horizontal mulches on the access routes used in watering the first catchments. The Spring 2011 Work Party will focus on completing the mulches.

### DESERT TORTOISE PRESERVE COMMITTEE, INC.

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All contributors receive the quarterly newsletter *Tortoise Tracks*.

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

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