



# Tortoise Tracks



The Desert Tortoise Preserve Committee, Inc.

Fall 2013 33:3

## *"Turn right at the pumpkin..."*

Article by Mary Kotschwar Logan

Photos by: Bob Wood, Lucia Acosta-Mack, Greg Cate and Steve & Marlene Ishii

Though they were not included in the directions generated by Google Maps, the instructions to "Turn right at the pumpkin" helped several DTPC volunteers arrive at the site of the Annual Fall Work Party in the Western Expansion Area of the [Desert Tortoise Research Natural Area](#) on October 12 and 13. Volunteer **Will Liebscher** brought the pumpkins and set them at important intersections, with labels or signs directing folks where to turn. Once people were headed in the right direction, however, the destination was hard to miss. The Work Party site was a hub of activity!

During the [Spring Work Party in April](#), our volunteers made great progress in removing trash from the Western Expansion Area, but it was clear that our work there was not finished. Unfortunately, people have been using these vacant lands as dump sites for household items, construction materials, and tires, and also as sites for target practice. We filled a 3-yard bin of trash during the spring event, but realized that a much larger effort (and dumpster) would be necessary to complete the clean-up. This fall, our dedicated volunteers rose to the occasion once again, turning out in large numbers, putting in long hours of tough labor, and maintaining great attitudes through it all.

The Fall Work Party turned out to be one of the largest DTPC stewardship events to date; forty-six volunteers joined DTPC staff during the two day event and contributed over 400 service hours. They came from all over southern California—students, teachers, and parents from Lancaster High School, [Boy Scouts from Ridgecrest Troop 848](#), residents of local communities, such as California City, Ridge-

crest, and Red Mountain, and DTPC members from the Los Angeles and San Diego areas. This amazing crew accomplished amazing things. We cleaned up five major trash sites and nearly filled a 40 cubic yard roll-off bin with debris. The final report from the disposal company came in a few weeks later: 6.79 tons of trash collected! That is 13,580 lbs. or almost 300 lbs per volunteer! If some the volunteers were feeling sore after the weekend, they had good cause--what a work out! We also finished signing the boundaries of the conservation area, with an additional 15 signs installed. By cleaning up sites visible from routes and roads and installing no trespass signs, we not only improved the habitat quality of the sites, but also discouraged future dumping in these areas. I was thoroughly impressed by the efforts and enthusiasm of our crew and proud of what everyone accomplished. THANK YOU!!

At one of the work sites, **Marlene Ishii** reached for some trash and discovered an occupied tortoise burrow. It was a great sighting and wonderful educational opportunity, especially for the high school students and Boy Scouts who gathered to observe the tortoise as she turned around in her burrow to face her audience. The sighting of this wonderful species the DTPC is working to protect was a good reminder of why we



(Continued on page 2)

were all out there!

With so many volunteers and so much to accomplish, many people stepped up to take on leadership roles. Special thanks to **Bonny Ahern** and **Craig Bansmer** who camped out the night before the event, set up our sign-in area, and shared their delicious food with everyone; to **Kolene Dearmore**, a registered nurse who set up a first aid station and stayed on site to provide medical care if anyone was hurt; to **Steve and Marlene Ishii** who arrived with clean-up equipment and loaded GPS units, ready to lead groups out to different sites; to **Chuck Hemingway** who helped scout and map the trash deposits before the work party; to **Dave Zantiny** for bringing his personal trailer for use as a first aid station and bathroom; to **David Logan** for grilling food for everyone on Saturday afternoon, and to **Will Liebscher** who brought a trailer full of clean-up equipment and who ferried large loads of trash to the bin for unloading. Thanks to many others who also used their personal vehicles for transporting trash, and to the **California City Police Department** for helping us properly dispose of approximately 30 tires and casings collected during the event!

We were delighted to have **Ted Hodgkinson** of the [China Lake Astronomical Society](http://www.chinalakeastro.com) with us on Saturday evening. He brought a high-powered telescope and provided an excellent sky-viewing program for our volunteers. Ted showed us prominences on the sur-



face of the late afternoon sun, Venus, Saturn, binary stars, a globular cluster, and several beautiful views of the moon. He also pointed out major constellations and described certain astronomical phenomena. The



Beautiful view of the moon – L. Acosta-Mack

sky-gazing was a special way to end a great day. Ted has already sent us a list of the best weekends for sky-gazing in the spring and we hope to have him back for the

## Spring Work Party.



While it is discouraging that so much trash had accumulated in this desert tortoise habitat, removing 6.79 tons of it is definitely a positive step in the right direction. During the work

party, volunteers noticed other areas that needed attention and some have generously offered to come back for future work parties, or to help us with other stewardship projects. By popular demand, a Winter Work Party is also in the works. I left the weekend feeling very encouraged, not only by what everyone accomplished, but also by the momentum this effort seemed to generate: more people showing up to support conservation efforts for the desert tortoise and the other species that share its habitat, more people wanting to do more. Let's keep this movement going—let's do more!

The DTPC thanks our amazing Work Party crew for making this such a successful clean-up event!



To view more pictures from the Fall Work Party, visit our Facebook page: <http://www.Facebook.com/DTPC.inc>





The DTPC will celebrate 40 years of desert tortoise conservation and habitat protection during the January 25, 2014 Annual Meeting and Banquet. The Committee began with the goal of establishing and protecting the Desert Tortoise Preserve (now Desert Tortoise Research Natural Area) in the West Mojave Desert. DTPC efforts have evolved and expanded to an active land acquisition program that preserves desert habitat, wildlife and plants in 4 California counties and many other related endeavors. DTPC members, agency partners and organization partners have contributed tremendously to DTPC achievements. We hope that past and current members and partners will join us for the January 25 celebration.





## Status of the Desert Tortoise Conservation Center Closure

*Article by: Lucia Acosta-Mack*

In late August, many people saw that desert tortoises were making headlines with the planned closure of the Desert Tortoise Conservation Center (DTCC) in Las Vegas, Nevada. Initially, an inaccurate article was published stating that thousands of desert tortoises were going to be euthanized because the DTCC was being shut down due to insufficient funding. The DTPC received numerous calls from concerned citizens wondering how they could help and asking if this information was correct. Many people offered to adopt tortoises and even offered their property for desert tortoise sanctuaries!

In response to the article, the DTPC developed a statement to clarify what was really occurring at the DTCC and expressing our position on this situation. The statement included the following points:

- While the DTCC is on track to close in December 2014, the US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) will not be euthanizing healthy tortoises housed there.
- Only severely ill or injured tortoises that are unresponsive to treatment or cannot be rehabilitated will be euthanized; the DTPC supports euthanasia of such animals using appropriate veterinary protocols and under the supervision of a veterinarian with tortoise expertise.
- Healthy tortoises will be translocated to designated lands in Nevada.
- California residents cannot adopt tortoises from the DTCC because it is illegal to take tortoises across state lines. Agassiz's desert tortoise is a state- and federally threatened species and protected under both state and federal laws.
- The situation in California differs from that in Nevada due to a long-standing relationship between California Department of Fish and Wildlife and the California Turtle and Tortoise Club (CTTC). The CTTC is the official organization that manages adoptions for captive tortoises in California. The CTTC has undertaken this enormous public service task on a volunteer basis, and is to be commended for its efforts.
- To avoid situations such as those in Nevada, the public needs to be aware that captive breeding of desert tortoises is illegal, to keep opposite gender tortoises separate, and to understand the importance of proper husbandry measures.

Shortly after the September board meeting of the DTPC, our acting President, **Ron Berger**, submitted a letter to the USFWS Pacific Southwest Region Director, **Ren Lohofener**, and hand delivered it to key politicians in Washington D.C. The content of the letter is as follows:

"We write today to urge you not to close the Desert Tortoise Conservation Center (DTCC).

The DTCC provides an important site for education of the public, for research, for teaching, and as a refuge for wild tortoises removed from Nevada development areas, and for unwanted captive tortoises. It should be maintained as such. We do not think that the proposal to close it and release the captives is a sound, scientifically-based solution. Instead, it appears to be a plan to get rid of a problem quickly, relatively easily, and expeditiously. It might save the government money in the short-term but it is highly likely to have tragic unintended long term negative consequences.

The Desert Tortoise Preserve Committee, Inc. (DTPC) has nearly forty years of experience creating, fencing and maintaining the Desert Tortoise Natural Area (DTNA), now encompassing nearly forty square miles of protected habitat for the Mojave Desert Tortoise. The DTPC has a long history of dealing with unauthorized releases of captives at the DTNA. In fact, we discovered the outbreak of upper respiratory tract disease in 1989. We are keenly aware of the problems associated with releasing captives into the wild and, despite public education programs, we find captives released at our own DTNA from time to time and many

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are ill. We stand ready to assist you in developing positive, defensible, meaningful solutions for the issues facing DTCC.

The DTCC was set up in part to fulfill a lawsuit settlement at the time of the federal listing of the desert tortoise as a threatened species in 1989-1990. It has been used as a maintenance site for the 800+ tortoises that were part of the aforementioned lawsuit settlement, as well as storage and transfer site for thousands of Nevada's captive and wild tortoises. It is our understanding that over 10,000 captive and wild tortoises have been translocated from the DTCC to the long-term fenced translocation site near Jean, Nevada, in the past several years.

We have learned about problems and challenges at the DTCC over the last several years from presentations and field trips given by representatives of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and San Diego Zoo at Desert Tortoise Council Symposia and from news releases issued by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, as well as from news articles. Very few studies have been done on the 10,000 or more tortoises translocated from the DTCC to the long-term fenced site, and those which have been done have been short-term in nature. Although the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has had many years to initiate scientifically-based research to determine the long-term efficacy of these translocations (e.g., survivorship of captives vs. residents vs. wild translocatees by year of translocation, size class, or gender; causes of death), the agency has spent its funds elsewhere. Yet, without scientifically based long-term studies, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Services is undertaking more translocations, the latest being at Trout Canyon, with hundreds of captive tortoises. Thoroughly examining the results of the more than 10,000 translocations at the long-term translocation site at Jean, Nevada would seem the only prudent source of action. We realize that the new translocations are being undertaken by representatives from both the San Diego Zoo and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. We nevertheless think them imprudent.

We wish to point out that over the past 20 years, substantial mitigation funds were generated through development of lands in the Las Vegas Valley and elsewhere in Nevada and as part of management plans. A very small portion of these funds were used to maintain the DTCC. Had these funds been set aside as an endowment to maintain the DTCC in perpetuity, it is obvious that interest from the endowment could have assisted in maintaining the DTCC.

The DTPC is opposed to the current and planned releases of hundreds to thousands of captive and wild tortoises to unfenced wild settings, such as the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is now undertaking in Trout Canyon. The DTPC does not believe that these planned releases are appropriate or in the best interests of recovery of the species for several reasons:

- The first and critical effort should be focused on determining the outcome of the releases of captives and wild tortoises at the long-term fenced site near Jean using scientifically-based methods and reporting. There is a wealth of information that can be gleaned from that site and much can be learned about survival of the released animals over a multi-year period. We think that this should be the highest priority for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and other entities associated with the DTCC.
- A second and very important consideration is infectious disease. The provenance of the captives is unknown. There are many new and emerging infectious diseases in reptiles, and, based on published studies, most captives are likely to have been exposed to one or more of these diseases, as well as yet un-described diseases.
- Prior to additional releases in unfenced areas, a great deal more scientifically-based information is highly desirable, including status of resident populations, carrying capacity of the habitat now and in the coming decades, and human-related impacts.
- The DTPC is convinced that the planned approach of continuing to release unwanted captive and wild tortoises fails to attack the root of the problem, which is unauthorized captive breeding and poor husbandry of captives. We instead recommend strong and powerful education programs, training local veterinarians in sterilization/neutering of captives, and adoption of neutered captive tortoises.

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In summation, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service should not, under any circumstances, close the DTCC. It should not release tortoises from the DTCC, or tortoises received in the future, until long-term efficacy of previous translocations is known."

Ron reports that the letter was hand-delivered to several congressmen and women, and senators' offices, and that he had the opportunity to speak directly with several aides and representatives, many of whom were very familiar with the DTCC closure. Several people Ron contacted said they would also contact **Ren Lohofener** of USFWS.

Want to learn more? Want to take action? Check out the links below:

Statement Regarding Media Reports on Status of Desert Tortoise at the Desert Tortoise Conservation Center in Nevada:

<http://www.fws.gov/cno/press/release.cfm?rid=526>

Defenders of Wildlife template email urging Secretary of the Interior, Sally Jewel, to keep the DTCC open and to stop the release of captive tortoises to the wild: <https://secure.defenders.org/site/Advocacy?cmd=display&page=UserAction&id=2645>

Website of the California Turtle and Tortoise Club, with information on desert tortoise adoption and care: <http://www.tortoise.org/>



## SOLD!

In mid-September, **Jeff Cuevas**, a Wells Fargo employee and a DTPC member, informed us that he was holding an auction as part of the Wells Fargo Community Support Campaign and that all monies collected would be donated to the DTPC. We thanked him for his generosity and initiative and were excited about the fundraiser.

A month later we received a large envelope from Jeff with checks totaling \$1,052.50!! Jeff was pleasantly surprised by the amount raised from his 55 donated items, mostly CDs and DVDs, which were quite popular in the nationwide online auction. He remarked that he has always had a special place in his heart for tortoises and wanted to give to a smaller organization, such as the DTPC, which tends to get less recognition than some larger charities. We are so grateful for Jeff's project, which not only helps fund the important conservation efforts of the DTPC, but also increases public awareness of the threatened desert tortoise. Let Jeff be an inspiration to you like he is to us—think about the DTPC during workplace charity campaigns and support our continued land acquisition, preserve management, research and outreach efforts!

## The DTPC would like to thank the following volunteers:

<b>Ron Berger</b>	<b>Glen Baumbach</b>	<b>Tim Kirkpatrick</b>	<b>Ed Patrovsky</b>
<b>Dr. Kristin Berry</b>	<b>Frank Bedard</b>	<b>John Krafczyk</b>	<b>Kevin Price</b>
<b>Laura Stockton</b>	<b>Daniel Bisby</b>	<b>Lisa LaVelle</b>	<b>John Przybyszewski</b>
<b>Bob Wood</b>	<b>Greg Cate</b>	<b>Will Liebscher</b>	<b>Elaine, Adrian and Noah</b>
<b>Dave Zantiny</b>	<b>Jeff Cuevas</b>	<b>David Logan</b>	<b>Riendeau</b>
<b>Lucia Acosta-Mack</b>	<b>Kolene Dearmore</b>	<b>Cecelia and Silvia Lopez</b>	<b>Karen Sanders</b>
<b>Bonny Ahern</b>	<b>Allan Eggleton</b>	<b>Charles Massieon</b>	<b>Andrea Sandoval</b>
<b>Kemp Anderson</b>	<b>Mike &amp; Ginny Gillum</b>	<b>Laura Mogg</b>	<b>Ashley Spenceley</b>
<b>Nathan Ankery</b>	<b>Chuck Hemingway</b>	<b>Sarah Motevalli</b>	<b>Hanna Strauss</b>
<b>Dana Arbeit</b>	<b>Rachel and Rebecca Hewitt</b>	<b>Kevin and Kurtis Murphy</b>	<b>Malia Tui</b>
<b>Craig Bansmer</b>	<b>Ted Hodgkinson</b>	<b>Alex Neibergs</b>	<b>California City Police</b>
<b>Todd Battey</b>	<b>Marlene &amp; Steve Ishii</b>	<b>Stephanie Pappas</b>	<b>Department</b>

## DTPC Calendar of Events

**December 14, 2013:** DTPC Board Meeting, DTPC Office, Riverside, CA

**January 25, 2014:** Annual Meeting & Banquet, Palmdale, CA

More information for each event can be found by calling (951) 683-3872 or sending an email to [dtpc@pacbell.net](mailto:dtpc@pacbell.net).

Additional information can be found on the DTPC's website [www.tortoise-tracks.org](http://www.tortoise-tracks.org) and Facebook [www.facebook.com/dtpc.inc](http://www.facebook.com/dtpc.inc).

## Looking to get more involved?

If you have a deep concern for the continued preservation of the desert tortoise and its habitat and would like to do more to help promote the welfare of the Mojave Desert, contact us at (951) 683-3872 or by email at [dtpc@pacbell.net](mailto:dtpc@pacbell.net) for details on different service committees, Board activities, and other volunteer opportunities. There are many ways to help!

DTPC is an IRS recognized tax-exempt 501 (c)(3) nonprofit corporation.



### Preserve Manager & Conservation Coordinator

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### The Desert Tortoise Preserve Committee, Inc.

Founded 1974

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Individual membership \$ 15 annually [ ]  
 Family membership \$ 20 annually [ ]  
 Sponsor membership \$ 30 annually [ ]  
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 Life \$500

Membership Dues \$ \_\_\_\_\_  
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#### 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 (tax ID 23-7413415). 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:

**For more information on becoming a DTPC member, you can also contact us at (951) 683-3872 or visit our website at: <http://www.tortoise-tracks.org/wptortoisetracks/become-a-member>**





# Tortoise Tracks

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## Save the Date!

Desert Tortoise Preserve Committee, Inc.

Annual Meeting and Banquet  
The Palmdale Hotel

Saturday, January 25, 2014

The DTPC is turning 40!  
Join us in celebrating 40 years of desert  
tortoise conservation!

Details to follow!