



Tortoise Tracks



Spring Success!

Article by Craig Bansmer & Bonny Ahern

Photos by Laura Stockton and Steve & Marlene Ishii



Saturday, April 11, 2015 turned out to be another beautiful day in the Mojave Desert as 36 volunteers gathered at the [Desert Tortoise Research Natural Area](#) (DTRNA) for the annual DTPC Spring Work Party. Volunteers and other guests during the day were greeted by **Beau Campolong**, the new naturalist for the 2015 season. She graciously showed off the interpretive kiosk and the displays in the trailer, and explained the significance of the Preserve to the future of the desert tortoise.



A number of different activities were planned ahead and organized for the day by senior volunteers under the guidance of **Laura Stockton**. Laura provided an orientation to the gathered volunteers before the traditional group photograph was taken and teams headed out for their different assignments.

Chuck Hemingway, **Dave Zantiny**, and **Mark Bratton** cleaned, organized, and inventoried the tools and equipment in the DTPC storage locker at U-Store City in California City. Dave also put his handyman skills to good use repairing the wiring and preparing the BLM trailer for its return trip to Ridgecrest at the end of the naturalist season.

Steve Ishii, **Marlene Ishii** and a great group of students from **Lancaster High School**; **Becky Arreola**, **Haylee Plahn**, **Rachel Simmons**, **Ciera Smith**, **Susan Ercek**, **Luz Sanchez**, and **Maria Sanchez** accompanied by their dedicated teacher and long-time DTPC volunteer,



Glen Baumbach, headed to the Western Expansion Area to conduct an inventory survey of existing and proposed signs; and to perform land monitoring activities. Twenty-seven signs were located, labeled, and photographed. While the group did observe some evidence of illegal encroachment by off-road vehicles, non-native plants, and trash dump sites, they also recorded the presence of numerous native plant species, and even observed a [Mohave Ground Squirrel!](#) The students all helped to navigate, record observations, and collect trash.

Another team consisting of **Drew Wells**, **Joshua Rickard**, and **Craig Bansmer** headed out to the Eastern Expansion Area to conduct an inventory survey of existing and proposed signs in that area; which will be used by the Preserve Manager and DTPC Board to set future priorities. **Bonny Ahern** provided them with chauffeur services and picked up trash at every stop along the

(Continued on page 2)

(Continued from page 1)

way. The team hiked 4.4 miles to survey twenty-two sign sites on five different parcels, while giving Drew and Joshua the opportunity to hone their GPS skills. The team also had the chance to stop and admire some of the annual wildflowers and blooming shrubs along the twenty-three miles of dirt road driven.



Back at the interpretive center, hearty Cub Scouts and their families and leaders from **Cub Scout Pack 848** out of

Ridgecrest removed invasive non-native red brome grass, which, despite the drought, has been flourishing, from around the Preserve parking area and the trailers. Additionally, the scourge of American deserts, the invasive non-native Sahara mustard, was removed from the OHV camping area just outside the DTRNA by the dynamic team from Topanga – **Tim Kirkpatrick, Coleman Garside, and Nick Garside.**

Redistributing the gravel in the parking area that had become piled up on the edges and bare in the middle was a huge accomplishment. This heavy labor was accomplished by the tireless work of **Stieg Klein, Will Liebscher,** and the Cub Scouts and parents. Chuck reports that the gravel is now holding its proper position well, despite spring being the busy time of year for visitors to the Preserve. Good job, gravel team!



A potluck luncheon was the volunteers' reward for their labors. **John Krafczyk,** in addition to his labors at the



Preserve, brought an astounding homemade beef stew to share with all – lots of tender steak and fresh veggies, yum! Hot dogs of all kinds; beef, turkey, and veggie, plus all the fixings, were supplied by the DTPC. There was also fresh fruit, bagels, homemade cole slaw, and plenty of chips and crackers provided by various volunteers. Again the weather cooperated – the usual afternoon winds held off until all the eating was done.

Will once again graciously undertook the final task of a long and successful cleanup – hauling all of the collected trash to be recycled and properly disposed of. Yeah, Will!

Thank you to all our incredible volunteers, and especially to Stieg who drove 700 miles roundtrip from the Bay Area to participate: **Bonny Ahern, Becky Areola, Craig Bansmer, Glen Baumbach, Mark Bratton, Allan Eggleton, Susan Ercek, the Fehring family, the Garcia family, Coleman Garside, Nick Garside, Chuck Hemingway, Steve & Marlene Ishii, Tim Kirkpatrick, Stieg Klein, Isen Koontz, Robert Koontz, John Krafczyk, Will Liebscher, Ed Patrovsky, Michaele Patrovsky, Haylee Plahn, Joshua Rickard, Maria Sanchez, Luz Sanchez, Rachel Simmons, Ciera Smith, Laura Stockton, Drew Wells, and Dave Zantiny.**





2015 Naturalist Season

Beau Campolong was a first time [Desert Tortoise Research Natural Area](#) (DTRNA) Naturalist, but came with a great deal of interpretive experience. Her enthusiasm, resourcefulness and spirit of adventure further made her a great asset to our Naturalist Program. The relief Naturalist, [Lisa LeValle](#), returned for another season. Lisa's experience and adaptability helped make the program run smoothly.

The Naturalist presence at the DTRNA Interpretive Center was from the March 10 to June 5. With warmer than usual temperatures the annual plants flowered early and dried up rapidly. This somewhat limited wildlife activity and brought visitors later in the season. However, visitors did experience a great deal, as is apparent from Beau's article ([see page 4](#)).

The success of the 2015 Naturalist Program relied on the support of a number of volunteers and BLM staff. **Chuck Hemingway** has supported the naturalists since 1997 and often on a daily basis. The many ways he supported the Naturalist include supplying water and generator gas; providing trailer maintenance; and assisting with interpretation. The BLM interpretive trailer was moved to and from Ridgecrest by **Sam Fitton**, with BLM contractor **Marcus Lorusso** assisting with the return trip. Board Member and former Naturalist, [Freya Reder](#), provided the training at the beginning of the season. Board Member, **Dave Zantiny** moved the DTPC trailer from Ridgecrest, set it up and returned it to storage at the end of the season. **Steve and Marlene Ishii** gave Beau technical support. **Will Liebscher** assisted Dave and Chuck with covering the DTPC trailer for storage. Thanks to all of the Naturalist Program Team members who contributed to success of the 2015 season.

Laura Stockton
2015 Naturalist Program Coordinator



Preserve Manager & Conservation Coordinator

Telephone: (951) 683-3872
Fax: (951) 683-6949
Email: DTPC@tortoise-tracks.org
www.tortoise-tracks.org

The Desert Tortoise Preserve Committee, Inc.

Founded 1974

Board of Trustees

President	Ron Berger
Vice President	Open
Treasurer	Laura Stockton
Recording Secretary	Rachel Woodard
Board Member	Kristin Berry, Ph.D.
Board Member	Greg Lathrop
Board Member	Freya Reder
Board Member	Bob Wood
Board Member	Dave Zantiny



Like our Page: www.Facebook.com/DTPC.inc
Follow us on Twitter: twitter.com/gaggasiz



2015 Naturalist Report

Article by Beau Campolong



As I write this, we are at the [Desert Tortoise Research Natural Area](#) (DTRNA) finishing up the naturalist season for the year. This is my first season as a naturalist at the DTNRA and I am overwhelmed with awe for all of the people who continue to dedicate themselves to preserving and stewarding this truly incredible ecosystem. I'd like to share some of my experiences at the natural area this season and I hope you enjoy reading them.

I went out for an evening walk in early March, soon after I arrived at the DTRNA. As I walked along the [main loop](#), a dusk breeze began to rustle the creosote and the sun sunk lower into the west. The wildflowers carpeting the natural area were much more familiar to me now. Of course there were the gold fields of a small flowering plant in the Asteraceae family, aptly named "Alkali Goldfields." Then there were fields of gold of a different sort, a larger flowering plant called "Bigelow Coreopsis," also in the Aster family. There was the presence of the "Wide-bannered lupine" (a favorite food of the desert tortoise) dotting the fields of gold with hues of lavender and deep green. In the washes grew a kind of sand-mat in the Euphorbiaceae family also called "Rattlesnake weed." Just southwest of our trailers there was a stand of the magnificent "Desert Candlestick" that



could be seen from our Discovery Loop trail. As I walked along in the cool evening air, I noticed a white flower quite low to the ground that was not familiar to me. I had not noticed it throughout the day



and I stooped down to examine it. The petals were fused into a corolla and there was a wonderful jasmine-like scent emanating from the flower. I noticed these flowering plants everywhere I walked now, how could I have missed them earlier? Looking through desert wildflower identification books, I found this quote from Jane Pinheiro, "There is one small meadow I often go by...just to see the re-enacted miracle of desert snow...it happens each evening in May or June just as the sun is gathering up its long rays for its nightly plunge behind the mountains. The dry sandy stretch on which some grass and other things are turning brown, suddenly as one watches, becomes studded with shining white stars an inch or more across and a jasmine-like perfume is wafted into the evening air...As with virgin snowflakes, with the sun's rise the snowflakes vanish and one must look closely to find the tiny tubes of furled blossoms which are so camouflaged as to blend perfectly with the ground." Aha! It was "Desert Snow" and no wonder I had not seen it during the day, because the petals only unfurl when the sun is absent.

There have been many other wildflower species that have graced our presence this spring, too numerous to mention all of them! We have been overjoyed to receive a bit of rain in early March and a few small showers in April and May. As a result of this, the vegetation has been plentiful in early spring and the desert tortoises have had a substantial available food source. In early April the "White-Lined Sphinx" moth larvae (caterpillars) emerged in droves. What seemed like hundreds of thousands of them blanketed the desert floor and driving along the roads, it was difficult to avoid them as they crossed in search for vegetation to forage. One female white-lined sphinx moth (WLSM) (also known as a "Hawk Moth" or "Hummingbird Moth") can lay 500-1000 eggs at a time. This season we observed a WLSM caterpillar burrowing into the ground which at the time seemed like strange behavior. We discovered later they do this when they are ready to pupate. They may pupate for 2-3 weeks before emerging, or in some cases, they will overwinter underground. The WLSM caterpillar has a horn at the rear of its body and this is why many people associate the WLSM caterpillar with the "Horned Worm" (the famous bane of gardeners).



(Continued on page 5)

(Continued from page 4)

Why do you think a creature might have a horn on the opposite end of its body from its head? Why might this be advantageous against predators? I will leave that for you to decide.

Another fascinating insect we saw here at the DTRNA this season was the “Lytta Magister” also known as the “Master Blister Beetle.” I observed three sets of these beetles, all mating on the “Desert Blazing Star” plant. A male will court a female by climbing onto her back and sweeping his antennae along her head. Biologists believe she is actually weighing him because it has been observed that they must be evenly matched in size and weight in order for her to allow the male to court her. Once they begin mating, they may remain connected for over 24 hours! The female doesn’t allow this to hinder her need to forage and she does this as the male is rather helplessly dragged along with her. These beetles are named blister beetles because they carry a toxin in their yellow blood called cantharidin which causes human skin to become irritated and in some cases, blister. This substance is used as a defense mechanism for the beetles as well as is used by humans medicinally to treat warts.

The DTRNA has such a diverse range of species, all with their own fascinating story. It has been an absolute pleasure this season to discover and share some of these stories with visitors and to also listen to the stories visitors had of their own. **Sandra and Adlai Mack** came here this season in mid-April for 4 consecutive days and I got to know them well. They have domestic turtles and tortoises at their home in San Diego and they mentioned that they are very much like them: “slow, patient, and relentless.” Adlai got very sick in 2006 and needed a kidney transplant. Eight years passed and during that time, the couple found the DTRNA online and decided upon the trip as something to look forward to and work towards. On April 5, 2014 Adlai underwent a kidney transplant and needed to rest for a year in medical quarantine. One year later the one-year quarantine ended and they arrived here at the DTRNA on April 6, 2015. They went out each day slowly and steadily determined to see a tortoise in the wild. And finally while on the [Animal Loop](#), they were able to see one! This is an excerpt from Sandra’s journal she sent me so that I might be able to share it with the readers:

“Adlai was pushing his walker on the trails so he could sit frequently. When he discovered the tortoise, he called to it, he sat down on the walker seat, and the tortoise walked up to him and sat in his shade (right beside his pant leg), yawning and closing his eyes. After about five minutes, the tortoise woke up and moved on. It was a very meaningful experience with a wild tortoise. But even if we had not seen a tortoise, the place itself was a delight. Isolated (down a six-mile dirt road), quiet and protected by the Preserve boundaries, it was teeming with life.”

To everyone at the Desert Tortoise Preserve Committee, our members, volunteers, and visitors we are so grateful to all of you for your continued support allowing for this place to exist and to thrive.

Thank you for a lovely season.

The DTPC would like to thank the following volunteers

<i>Ron Berger</i>	<i>Becky Arreola</i>	<i>Nick Garside</i>	<i>Ed Patrovsky</i>
<i>Dr. Kristin Berry</i>	<i>Craig Bansmer</i>	<i>Marlene Ishii</i>	<i>Michaele Patrovsky</i>
<i>Chuck Hemingway</i>	<i>Glen Baumbach</i>	<i>Steve Ishii</i>	<i>Haylee Plahn</i>
<i>Greg Lathrop</i>	<i>BLM Ridgecrest Field Office</i>	<i>Tim Kirkpatrick</i>	<i>Joshua Rickard</i>
<i>Jun Lee</i>	<i>Mark Bratton</i>	<i>Stieg Klein</i>	<i>Maria Sanchez</i>
<i>Freya Reder</i>	<i>Allan Eggleton</i>	<i>Isen Koontz</i>	<i>Luz Sanchez</i>
<i>Laura Stockton</i>	<i>Susan Ercek</i>	<i>Robert Koontz</i>	<i>Rachel Simmons</i>
<i>Bob Wood</i>	<i>The Fehring Family</i>	<i>John Krafczyk</i>	<i>Ciera Smith</i>
<i>Rachel Woodard</i>	<i>Sam Fitton</i>	<i>Will Liebscher</i>	<i>Carl B. Symons</i>
<i>Dave Zantiny</i>	<i>The Garcia Family</i>	<i>Marcus Lorusso</i>	<i>Drew Wells</i>
<i>Bonny Ahern</i>	<i>Coleman Garside</i>	<i>Sandra & Adlai Mack</i>	

For more information call (951) 683-3872 or send an email to DTPC@tortoise-tracks.org, or check out the DTPC’s website www.tortoise-tracks.org and Facebook page www.facebook.com/dtpc.inc.

DTPC Gives and Overview of the DTRNA to DAC

Article by Robert Wood

Saturday, April 10, 2015 the Desert Tortoise Preserve Committee (DTPC) hosted members of the Bureau of Land Management Desert Advisory Council (DAC) and guests at the [Desert Tortoise Research Natural Area \(DTRNA\)](#) visitor center. The DAC is a volunteer citizen's group assembled to review and provide feedback and comments to BLM leadership and staff regarding the agency's plans and policies affecting California's desert resources. The DAC was interested in how the DTRNA functioned and protected and preserved the Desert Tortoise and other sensitive species. The morning began with **Mr. Carl B. Symons**, Field Manager, [BLM Ridgecrest Field Office](#) welcoming the DAC members, fellow BLM managers, and special guests. About 25 adults and several children attended the presentation and tour.



Mr. Ron Berger, DTPC President gave a presentation covering some of the legal and operational challenges that the DTPC is currently trying to resolve. Most notably, Ron explained in detail

how the DRECP maps and plans failed to recognize the DTRNA as a Desert Tortoise recovery and research area. Ron brought a captive juvenile pet tortoise for the visitors to examine. They were a big hit with the "children of all ages;" everyone likes baby animals.



Dr. Kristin Berry, Ph.D. explained to the visitors how the DTRNA was established and summarized some of the many scientific studies and research accomplished on the

site. The Desert Tortoise population dynamics, especially the loss of almost all the juveniles caused by Raven predation was central to her presentation. The very positive effect on the population of all species by fencing the habitat to keep off highway vehicles out of protected and managed areas was shown in several studies.



Mr. Robert Wood, DTPC Board Member gave a short presentation discussing the size and location of some of the mitigation lands the DTPC manages. He handed out a fact sheet describing the history of the DTRNA, how it operates, and future land acquisitions the Board is contemplating to assure long-term connectivity of high quality habitat. He explained how it is important for all agencies and the DTPC to acquire and manage mitigation lands at higher elevations; lands that will have higher quality vegetation as climate change drives changes in the habitat throughout the desert.



The DAC members asked questions, most notably about Raven management and the problems with the DRECP. They checked out Ron's tortoises, and then took a brief walking tour of the DTRNA lead by DTPC Naturalist **Ms. Beau Campolong**. The DAC enjoyed the tour and the presentations. The DTPC and the DAC share a common concern for the appropriate management and preservation of the desert.





DTPC President Published In *The Desert Sun* of Palm Springs

By Ron Berger

Last year, all of us at DTPC were incensed to learn that USFW would be permanently closing the Desert Tortoise Conservation Center in Nevada, which it had spent millions to build, and where it took in hundreds of desert tortoises uprooted by construction projects and other development throughout Nevada, and especially in and around Las Vegas. At that time, I wrote to the executive in charge, and personally took a DTPC letter expressing our concerns to every Nevada congressional office in Washington, D.C. I also discussed the issue with him, hoping to assure, if the center were closed, that the tortoises located there would be trans-located to an area where they had the highest likelihood to survive and prosper. In February, my wife **Carol**, DTPC Director **Rachel Woodard** and I joined a number of biologists and others in a tour of the area chosen for the trans-location. I was certainly impressed.

I decided to write an article which might serve several purposes: a) communicate to the USFW executives responsible for the closure that they had, in my opinion, done their best under challenging circumstances; b) to tell the story without divulging where the tortoises had been trans-located; and c) most importantly, to help Palm Springs area tourists not to exacerbate the problem.

The article they published follows:

HELP 'RECOVER' THE DESERT TORTOISE

Last week, a group of some 30 biologists and tortoise fans were treated to a tour of a remote Nevada canyon by Roy C. Averill-Murray, tortoise recovery expert at the Nevada office of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

Last December, amidst a great deal of furor by tortoise advocates, the Desert Tortoise Conservation Center facility housing hundreds of tortoises was closed. Past the angst, however, the reality is that Mr. Averill-Murray is leading the effort to recover the tortoise, a threatened species which has seen a 90% decline in its population in the past 40 years alone. This effort can best be observed out here in this remote canyon where 600 tortoises previously housed at the Recovery Center have been released into the 'wild'. Left to their own devices, but protected from being run over by 'tortoise-exclusion fencing', these tortoises will hopefully create a new home for themselves and begin to recover their population.

It is vitally important to their recovery that each of us do our part. If you see a tortoise in the wild – do not touch it! Do not pick it up! A frightened tortoise may void a year's worth of stored up fluid when touched. Then, unable to find a water source, it will die of dehydration. Don't step on or near tortoise burrows. The tortoise lives 95% of its life underground, unable to deal with our daily summer heat or our frigid winter nights, except in the relatively moderate underground temperatures in its burrow. Whatever you do, don't take a wild tortoise home. There are precious few in the wild, and removing any reduces their chance to mate, produce offspring, and survive. If you want a pet tortoise, there are plenty available for adoption. Simply contact the California Turtle and Tortoise Club, or here in the Valley, call Ann Clendening at 760-346-6271

Don't ever return your pet tortoise into the desert. Pet tortoises often carry diseases they caught from humans or pet dogs and cats. When reintroduced into the wild, they can infect otherwise healthy populations causing many to die. Please don't litter, as litter can both cause illness to tortoises and help subsidize the raven population. Ravens are deadly to tortoises, as they eat the babies and can flip and gut adults. Finally, if you are driving desert roads, and especially off-road, be especially careful to stay on marked roads and to watch for tortoise. They look like rocks and are easy to miss. But, obviously, if you run over a tortoise whether or not it is in its burrow, you likely will kill that tortoise. So, let's work together to help these gentle residents of our desert, who were here before the dinosaurs, to recover.

Mr. Berger is President of The Desert Tortoise Preserve Committee, a 41 year old organization which manages a 39.5 mile preserve known as the Desert Tortoise Research Natural Area (DTRNA). He is also President of The Desert Tortoise Conservancy (TDTC), a Palm Springs based non-profit working to build awareness of the plight of the desert tortoise. He can be reached at PO Box 4131, Palm Springs, CA 92262, or at ron@figaros.com.



Tortoise Tracks

NONPROFIT ORG.
U.S. POSTAGE
PAID
RIVERSIDE, CA
PERMIT NO. 3216

THE DESERT TORTOISE PRESERVE COMMITTEE
4067 MISSION INN AVENUE
RIVERSIDE, CALIFORNIA 92501

Address Service Requested



When you shop @ [AmazonSmile](#),
Amazon will make a donation to
Desert Tortoise Preserve Committee Inc.
<http://smile.amazon.com/ch/23-7413415>



Find us on
www.Facebook.com/DTPC.inc



Electronic copies of *Tortoise Tracks* are in **COLOR!**
If you would prefer to receive an electronic copy, notify us
by email at DTPC@tortoise-tracks.org

DESERT TORTOISE PRESERVE COMMITTEE, INC.

MEMBERSHIP/DONOR FORM

NAME _____ DATE _____
ADDRESS _____ RENEWAL
CITY _____ NEW
STATE _____ ZIP _____

Individual membership \$ 20 annually []
Family membership \$ 30 annually []
Sponsor membership \$ 50 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 (tax ID 23-7413415). All contributions 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: