



# Tortoise Tracks



The Desert Tortoise Preserve Committee, Inc.

Spring 2016 36:1

## 41st Annual Meeting and Banquet



Article by: Jill Estrada

Photos by: Marlene Ishii

### EVENTS

On January 30, 2016, the Desert Tortoise Preserve Committee hosted its 41st Annual Meeting and Banquet. Approximately fifty guests attended the event, which was located at the Elks Lodge in Lancaster, CA.

The event began with the annual meeting, where DTPC president, **Ron Berger**, opened the presentation and announced the launch of the Coalition for a Balanced Environment (CBE), an effort to accelerate raven management protocols and to advocate changes to federal and state laws to permit active raven population control measures. Preserve Manager and Conservation Coordinator, **Jill Estrada** presented the previous year's accomplishments, challenges, and goals for the future, and **Jun Lee**, Land Acquisition Manager, provided an overview of land acquired in 2015. **Laura Stockton**, Treasurer, presented the treasurer's report on finances. **Carl Symons** and **Carrie Woods**, from the BLM-Ridgecrest office, gave an informative presentation about land management updates for the DTRNA and surrounding areas. Their presentation concluded with an emphasis on the importance of the partnership between BLM and the DTPC, and their continued support of our efforts. Additionally, active members who were present voted to renew the Board of Director terms of **Ron Berger**, **Laura Stockton**, **Dave Zantiny**, and **Rachel Woodard**.



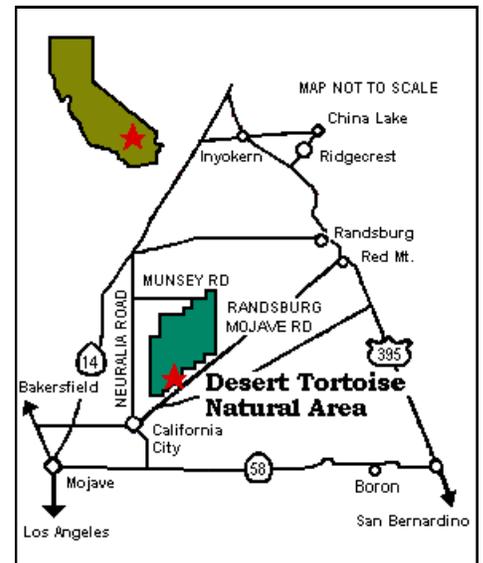
Following the meeting, a social mixer allowed remaining banquet attendees to arrive while everyone mingled and prepared for the highlight of the event. Keynote speaker, **Mark Faull**, retired park ranger, gave a phenomenal presentation about Red Rock Canyon State Park and the great flood of 1997.

Recognition was given to Solution Strategies, Inc. for providing invaluable guidance to the DTPC in developing a long-term strategic plan, as well as **Jane McEwan** for donating a tortoise batik, **Mari Quillman** and her family for donating their deceased family tortoise, and to Eagle scout, **Zachary Burns**, for creating a desert tortoise habitat that was premiered at the Maturango Museum on February 6th. We would like to thank everyone who attended the event for creating a joyful atmosphere filled with exuberant conversations about various topics.



*Please join us for the*  
**Desert Tortoise Preserve Committee  
Annual Spring Work Party!  
April 2 & 3, 2016**

Saturday, April 2, from  
9 AM to 2 PM  
at the Desert Tortoise  
Research Natural Area  
&  
Sunday, April 3, location  
and time TBD



Help out with valuable  
stewardship projects, while  
learning more about the  
desert ecosystem and the  
desert tortoise!

**If you are interested in  
participating on one or both  
days, please call  
(951) 683-3872 or email  
dtpc@pacbell.net**

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## 2016 Naturalist Season

Article by Jill Estrada



The Naturalist season is about to begin, starting on March 14<sup>th</sup> and concluding on June 5<sup>th</sup>. This year, we welcome a new full-time naturalist, Sharon Schafer. Sharon has had a successful career as a wildlife biologist, naturalist, education program developer, artist, and photographer. She shares our passion for the preservation of wildlife and is excited to spend time educating the public about Western Mojave ecology and why it is important to conserve. If you would like to learn more about Sharon or see some of her beautiful artwork and photography, visit [www.skydancestudio.com](http://www.skydancestudio.com). We are also pleased to announce that Lisa LaVelle will be returning as our part-time naturalist. Lisa has filled this position for the past three years. Her dedication and knowledge ensure a spectacular naturalist season.

The Desert Tortoise Preserve Committee will be hosting a Naturalist season kickoff event on 4/16 from 11 am to 3pm to welcome visitors to the DTRNA to meet our naturalists and get a sneak peak of the Spring bloom. Join us for an afternoon of snacks, friendly conversation, and beautiful views of the Natural Area.

### THE DTPC INVITES PUBLIC COMMENTS ON OHV GRANT APPLICATION

The Desert Tortoise Preserve Committee (DTPC) invites public comments on its preliminary grant application to the California State Parks Off-Highway Motor Vehicle Recreation (OHMVR) Division. The DTPC is requesting funding to support a restoration project in the Eastern Expansion Area of the Desert Tortoise Research Natural Area, adjacent to an authorized OHV route managed by the Bureau of Land Management and California City Police Department. The purpose of the Restoration Grants Program, as defined by the OHMVR Division, is to provide Ecological Restoration or Repair to habitat damaged by authorized or unauthorized OHV use. The DTPC seeks restoration funds to prevent continued habitat degradation related to unauthorized OHV activity on approximately 2,700 acres of conservation lands and to begin the restoration process on disturbed areas by protective fencing. The DTPC will provide some matching dollars to the project. If funded, the DTPC will install wildlife-friendly fencing around areas of contiguous conservation lands, followed by trash removal and control of invasive plant infestations. Where fencing is not feasible, unauthorized routes will be camouflaged to discourage unauthorized use. Additionally, if conditions allow, the DTPC will begin collecting native seed for future revegetation projects.

The DTPC will also request funding to re-instate a responsible recreation education program providing important information to the OHV community. This program is intended to increase public knowledge about the effects of irresponsible OHV use and to help prevent the creation of illegal trails. The DTPC would appreciate your comments on these projects. You can review the grant applications, along with those from other agencies, local governments, and non-profits, on-line at [www.ohv.parks.ca.gov](http://www.ohv.parks.ca.gov). The public comment period is open from Tuesday, March 8, 2016 to Monday, April 4, 2016. Comments should be sent directly to the OHMVR Division at [ohvinfo@parks.ca.gov](mailto:ohvinfo@parks.ca.gov) and to the DTPC at [dtpc@pacbell.net](mailto:dtpc@pacbell.net). Late comments will be forwarded to the division separately. Final grant applications are due May 2, 2016. For more information about the proposed restoration project, a public meeting will be held at the DTPC office in Riverside to provide an overview of both projects. Please contact the DTPC office at (951) 683 - 3872 or [dtpc@pacbell.net](mailto:dtpc@pacbell.net) for additional information.

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## EDUCATION/OUTREACH

### Creating a legacy for Big Daddy

Article and Photos by Jill Estrada

Big Daddy is a desert tortoise who was donated to us by The Huber family and DTPC member and friend, Mari Quillman. Big Daddy was acquired by a family in Long Beach, CA when he was approximately 20 years old. They cared for him for 65 years until they were no longer able to, at which time he was adopted by family friends, the Huber family. He spent the remaining 25 years of his life in Anaheim, CA being cared for by Pat, Jessica, William, and Alex Huber. Big Daddy spent his days regularly marching around the yard, keeping an eye on his domain and his long-time companion, Big Momma (who is still alive at 85 years old), and munching on his favored red Hibiscus flowers. He passed away at roughly the age of 110.

Big Daddy is an important addition to the DTPC education program. In a coordinated effort with California Turtle and Tortoise Club and local schools within Los Angeles, San Bernardino, Riverside, and Kern counties, talks and presentations are given to students and interested members of the public about the biology of the desert tortoise, the ecology of the Mojave Desert, and the challenges and accomplishments involved in conserving the species. The natural pose in which Big Daddy was masterfully preserved will allow students and visitors the ability to appreciate the beauty of the desert tortoise and to closely examine the intricacies of the body and shell. Big Daddy will create a legacy of helping us to educate the public and to help them understand the magnificence of the desert tortoise.



**Preserve Manager & Conservation Coordinator**  
**Jillian Estrada**

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[www.tortoise-tracks.org](http://www.tortoise-tracks.org)



Like our Page: [www.Facebook.com/DTPC.inc](http://www.Facebook.com/DTPC.inc)

### 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

## Interested in a Pet Turtle or Tortoise?

*By the California Turtle & Tortoise Club Executive Board*

The California Turtle & Tortoise Club (CTTC) is a non-profit 501 (c) (3) organization whose primary focus is on turtles and tortoises of all species with emphasis on captive native desert tortoises (*Gopherus Agassizii*). Our Club promotes the preservation, conservation, welfare of and assistance with captive care of turtles and tortoises.

The CTTC, founded in 1964, has 15 chapters conveniently located from Central through Southern California. Many chapters hold local meetings, annual shows, sponsor field trips and participate in community outreach and educational activities that highlight turtle and tortoise species from around the world. If you are interested in attending any of these events, or wish to contact us, please go to [www.tortoise.org](http://www.tortoise.org) and select our chapters' websites for coming events. If you are interested in becoming a member, please visit the "About CTTC" page at <http://www.tortoise.org/cttcmemb.html>. All meetings and events are open to the general public; we hope you will consider joining us.

The CTTC volunteers are proud of the extensive work they do with our adoption program, especially with our native desert tortoises. Each year Adoption Teams work with rescues and animals relinquished to us by the public who can no longer keep their turtles or tortoises. Our teams are always looking for loving, long term homes for all these amazing creatures. We offer, free of charge by CTTC:

- In-person habitat wellness evaluations,
- Inexpensive and innovative habitat safety fixes,
- Veterinarian referrals,
- Healthy diet suggestions which include natural plants promoting long, healthy lives.

Although there are other organizations that can rescue and re-home turtles and tortoises, CTTC is the only organization that can issue a permit for a captive desert tortoise. In 2015, CTTC took in approximately 1,346 turtles and tortoises, of which 617 were desert tortoises. Though the number of desert tortoises we work with seems staggering, two of the most difficult to rehome are the African Sulcata tortoise (adult males can reach 100-200 pounds) and the Red Ear Slider water turtle. Both can be rather destructive to their habitats, as well as being damaging to native Western Pond Turtle and desert tortoise (*Gopherus Agassizii*) native habitats. There are a variety of reasons for the large numbers as well as the reasons given when these animals are relinquished:

- Backyard breeding (PLEASE: see *Note* below regarding desert tortoise breeding).
- "Impulse Buy" for children who often soon lose interest and parents don't want to care for them.
- "Impulse Buy" without understanding needs and care and realization that can't or don't want to provide same.
- People moving to unhealthy environment for the tortoise or out of state.
- Elderly or illness and can no longer provide care for them.
- Found wandering neighborhoods as lost pets.

Whatever the reasons, CTTC feels education is the key factor to decreasing the number of these animals that need homes. Husbandry, habitat, food requirements and ways to prevent backyard breeding are just some of the education CTTC provides to the public regarding different types of turtles and tortoises.

The CTTC is a volunteer organization operating solely on donations. If you are interested in learning more about adopting a long term turtle or tortoise, please see our website and visit the chapter closest to you at [www.tortoise.org](http://www.tortoise.org). Adoption applications may be found at <http://www.tortoise.org/cttc/adoption2.html> and your local chapter looks forward to the opportunity to assist you in finding a new shelled family member.

***Note:*** *The free permit to keep a desert tortoise in California is NOT a permit to breed. Breeding of captive desert tortoises is against CADFW regulations; releasing any captive desert tortoise into the wild, of any size and/or age, is illegal and punishable by law.*

## Introducing the Coalition for a Balanced Environment

Article by Jill Estrada

Over the weekend of February 19-21, the Desert Tortoise Preserve Committee attended the annual Desert Tortoise Council Symposium. At the symposium, DTPC president, **Ron Berger**, gave a presentation announcing the creation of the Coalition for a Balanced Environment (CBE). Over the past decade alone, desert tortoise populations have declined by 50%. Ravens are arguably the leading cause of this decline, targeting juveniles and removing a large portion of recruitment generations. Although ravens are a native species of California, their population has been growing exponentially, having negative effects on local ecosystems. The CBE will be comprised of collaborative organizations and will spearhead a long overdue effort to accelerate existing local raven management ordinances and the implementation of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's 2008 Desert Tortoise Recovery Plan. From there, the coalition will leverage that effort to bring enhanced raven management practices throughout California for greater benefit of not just wildlife, but also agriculture and industry. For more information, visit [www.cbecalifornia.org](http://www.cbecalifornia.org).



## DTPC Calendar of Events

- **March 14, 2016:** Naturalist Season begins  
*Visit the Desert Tortoise Research Natural Area any day from March 14-June 5th and meet our naturalists*
- **April 2-3, 2016:** DTPC Spring Work Party.  
*- Help the DTPC with stewardship and monitoring at the Desert Tortoise Research Natural Area*
- **April 16, 2016:** Naturalist Welcome Event  
*Join us at the DTRNA Interpretive Center for free food, drinks, and information about desert tortoises*

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

Ron Berger	Rachel Woodard	Marlene Ishii
Dr. Kristin Berry	Dave Zantiny	Steve Ishii
Chuck Hemingway	Bonny Ahern	Lisa LaVelle
Greg Lathrop	Richard Anderson	
Jun Lee	Craig Bansmer	
Freya Reder	Kolene Dearmore	
Laura Stockton	Jill Estrada	
Bob Wood	Chuck Hemingway	

For more information call (951) 683-3872 or send an email to [dtpc@pacbell.net](mailto:dtpc@pacbell.net) or check out the DTPC's website [www.tortoise-tracks.org](http://www.tortoise-tracks.org) and Facebook page [www.facebook.com/dtpc.inc](http://www.facebook.com/dtpc.inc).

## RESEARCH

**New Species of Tortoise in the Former Range of *Gopherus morafkai***

Article by Jill Estrada

Populations of tortoises previously included in the southern portion of the *G. morafkai* range have now been determined to be a distinct, third species. The new species, Goode's Thornscrub Tortoise (*Gopherus evgoodei*), is found in tropical thornscrub and tropical deciduous forest habitat in Western Mexico. A team of researchers studied the genetic and morphological differences between the Sonoran and Sinaloan lineages of *G. Morafkai* and found them to be significant. Morphological differences in the new, Sinaloan lineage compared to Mojave and Sonoran desert tortoises include shorter tails in both males and females, a flatter carapace, rounded pads on the rear feet, and a shell with an orange hue compared to brown and green in the other two species. Designating this lineage as a distinct species significantly reduces the former range of *G. morafkai*, but is an important and exciting event in tortoise research and conservation. *G. evgoodei* is found in the most threatened habitat of the three sister species, and shares this habitat with a diverse range of vulnerable bird, mammal, and reptile species. Due to the new distinction of the species, the conservation status of Goode's Thornscrub Tortoise is poorly understood. Additional research is needed to further assess its status, and to gain more knowledge of the species' ecology and behavior.

**Desert Tortoise Preserve Committee Celebrates New Publication****Assessing Site Occupancy of Mohave Ground Squirrels: Implications for Conservation**MARY KOTSCHWAR LOGAN,<sup>1</sup> *Desert Tortoise Preserve Committee, Inc., 4067 Mission Inn Avenue, Riverside, CA 92501, USA*

**ABSTRACT** To better understand the distribution and habitat relationships of the Mohave ground squirrel (*Xerospermophilus mohavensis*), a California state threatened species, I investigated site occupancy of squirrels using remote-sensing wildlife cameras (i.e., camera traps). In 2012, I conducted camera trap surveys at 96 randomly selected sites within and adjacent to the Desert Tortoise Research Natural Area, in the western Mojave Desert, California. In 1,105 camera trap days, there were 91 detections of squirrels at 30 out of 96 sites. I used single-season, single-species occupancy models to explore several survey and site variables hypothesized to influence detection probability ( $p$ ) and site occupancy ( $c$ ) of the species. Detection probability of squirrels varied with survey date and between 2 study areas, peaking in early April ( $p \frac{1}{4} 0.23$ ,  $SE \frac{1}{4} 0.05$  and  $p \frac{1}{4} 0.13$ ,  $SE \frac{1}{4} 0.05$ , respectively) but decreasing approximately 4-fold by the end of the study season in mid-May. Site occupancy was positively related to the length of ephemeral stream channel(s) within a site, increasing from 0.24 ( $SE \frac{1}{4} 0.07$ ) to 0.89 ( $SE \frac{1}{4} 0.10$ ) with the range of stream channel lengths observed. Vegetation transects conducted at the study sites in 2014 indicated higher percent canopy cover, species richness, and diversity of perennial shrubs along ephemeral stream channels than in the surrounding upland habitat. This study provides the first estimates of site occupancy and detection probability of Mohave ground squirrels using the non-invasive method of camera trapping. The findings have implications for design and timing of future studies, and highlight the importance of protecting ephemeral stream channels for Mohave ground squirrel conservation.



## DTPC MEMBERSHIP/CONTRIBUTION FORM

1. YES, I want to help save the threatened desert tortoise and its habitat! Here is my tax-deductible membership contribution of:

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> \$20 Individual | <input type="checkbox"/> \$75 Benefactor        |
| <input type="checkbox"/> \$30 Family     | <input type="checkbox"/> \$100 Patron/Corporate |
| <input type="checkbox"/> \$50 Sponsor    | <input type="checkbox"/> \$500 Life Membership  |

2. That's not nearly enough! Here's my additional contribution of \$ \_\_\_\_\_.  
Please use it for:

- |                                       |   |  |
|---------------------------------------|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Fencing      | <input type="checkbox"/> Land Acquisition | <input type="checkbox"/> Where Most Needed |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____ |   |  |

3. I'd like to help you grow the DTPC endowment.  
Please accept an additional donation of:

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> \$250   | <input type="checkbox"/> \$2,500        |
| <input type="checkbox"/> \$500   | <input type="checkbox"/> \$5,000        |
| <input type="checkbox"/> \$1,000   | <input type="checkbox"/> Other \$ _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Marketable Securities (Stock): Contact DTPC Finance Committee Chairperson, Greg Lathrop at <a href="mailto:2redgrey@gmail.com">2redgrey@gmail.com</a> or (415) 637-7187 for instruction |   |

Let's get the endowment started!

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

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

Email Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Please make your check payable to DTPC and mail to:

**Desert Tortoise Preserve Committee**  
**4067 Mission Inn Ave.**  
**Riverside, CA 92501.**

Thank you.

\*All contributors receive the Tortoise Tracks newsletter. The Desert Tortoise Preserve Committee is an IRS recognized tax-exempt 501(c)(3) nonprofit corporation. All contributions and/or annual membership dues are fully tax-deductible. Contributor information is kept confidential and is not disclosed to third parties.

\* [www.tortoise-tracks.org](http://www.tortoise-tracks.org) \*



# Tortoise Tracks

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THE DESERT TORTOISE PRESERVE COMMITTEE  
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RIVERSIDE, CALIFORNIA 92501

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**When visiting the desert, always remember to  
check under your vehicle for wildlife.**

