



Tortoise Tracks



The Desert Tortoise Preserve Committee, Inc.

Summer 2017 37:2

2017 Spring Work Party



EVENTS

- by Jill Estrada

On March 18th, volunteers met at the Desert Tortoise Research Natural Area to commence a beautiful and productive day of work at the DTRNA as well as at the eastern expansion area which was just fenced as part of a restoration project. Forty four volunteers drove a total of over 7,000 miles to the DTRNA from their homes throughout southern California to work on stewardship projects which included sign installation, fence maintenance, and kiosk cleaning. Volunteers were split into seven groups, all of which had a designated area of work along the approximately 12 miles of fencing in the eastern expansion area and the interpretive center at the DTRNA. For more than five hours, volunteers walked along the fence line installing approximately 250 private property signs and reflective object markers which reduce collisions. **Craig Bansmer** drove between teams delivering needed materials and keeping track of the work's progress. Additionally, one team scrubbed the interpretive kiosk at the DTRNA to remove bird urates and another replaced

faded signs along the northeastern fence line of the DTRNA. The installation of these signs is critical to removing the threat of trespass by illegal off-road vehicles and sheep grazers onto our land and to reducing any injuries to off-road enthusiasts. The time spent installing signs also allowed for fence monitoring of the new fence. Two cuts were observed and repaired. It is expected that these cuts will persist for a short while, as this area has been used by off-road enthusiasts for decades. Hopefully, as time passes and with further education, enthusiasts will begin to realize that the area is indeed private property and not open to OHV riding.



(Continued on page 2)

After all of the work was complete, volunteers met back at the interpretive center to discuss our success and enjoy the beauty of the desert while replenishing ourselves with a delicious lunch. **Bonny Ahern** acted as hostess to the after-work lunch. Some of the visitors explored the hiking trails and were able to find a large male tortoise foraging; a great way to wrap up a great day!

We would like to extend our thanks to all of those who attended the work party. An extraordinary amount of work was completed, saving us a great deal of money which would have gone towards contracting the tasks but can now be used to acquire and protect more tortoise habitat.



Photo Credit: Tom Astle

Naturalist Season Welcome Party

On March 25, the Desert Tortoise Preserve Committee hosted a welcome party at the Desert Tortoise Research Natural Area to celebrate the beginning of the new naturalist season. The event was meant to reach out to the local communities to improve the relationships between local residents and the desert and to increase visitation by them. The Natural Area saw approximately fifty visitors who showed up to a beautiful day full of wildflowers and numerous desert tortoise sightings. Throughout the event we heard testimonies from many visitors about not previously knowing of the DTRNA but thoroughly enjoying their time exploring.



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The Desert Tortoise Preserve Committee, Inc.

Founded 1974

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Naturalist Summary—Sharon Schafer

Abundance. The summary of the DTRNA naturalist report for 2017 is the word abundance.

The land responded to the heavy rains of winter with an amazing display of life for the 2017 season. In mid-March when I arrived, the rising tide of spring had already spread across the land. A solid brilliant gold carpet of alkali goldfields spread beneath the creosote, accented here and there by contrasting blue and purple palette of dense stands of notch-leaf Phacelia and blue dicks. The white carpet of evening snow opened at dusk and scented the air with their intoxicating fragrance. With the rising dawn the evening snow closed and a carpet of delicate white Lianthus unfurled.

With the exuberant growth of the flora came a corresponding explosion of invertebrates and their predators. Leopard, whiptailed, and horned lizards were everywhere basking, hunting, courting and mating. Times were good and the desert life, always the opportunist, was making the best of it while times were good. They in turn were preyed on by red-tailed hawks and Swainson's Hawks, shrikes, as well as coyotes and kit foxes.

Our charismatic tortoises were also taking advantage of the abundance. By the time I arrived for my sojourn they were already out and active, taking advantage of mild temperatures, abundant food, and the best conditions in many seasons. They wandered the DTRNA with green moustaches, stains from gorging on the abundant food and their faces "powdered" with pollen from wading through the incredibly dense fields of goldfields. If a tortoise could smile, they were definitely smiling this year. The rhythm of the tortoises was robust and intense. Tortoises were seen fighting, mating, eating, basking, resting, burrowing and wandering in search of the tasty bite.

Our visitors were treated to an amazing display of the desert at its finest. Visitors came from as far away as New Zealand and Japan or as close as California City. Most were first time visitors, and none were disappointed. If they didn't see tortoises they saw whiptail lizards, Say's phoebes, red-tailed hawks, Mojave shovel-nosed snakes, red racers, antelope ground squirrels, burrowing owls, kit foxes, verdins, western tanagers, and more. There was always something, new and amazing, surprising and unexpected.

The value of the DTRNA certainly is an important one of providing a protected unblemished landscape and a place for research, but its critical value lies in its ability to provide a place for visitors to explore and connect with the life and landscape of an undervalued and misunderstood arid land called the Mojave Desert. Here visitors experienced it as a place of much beauty, abundant life, and unfailing tenacity and left with the understanding that it as a place to be cherished and protected.

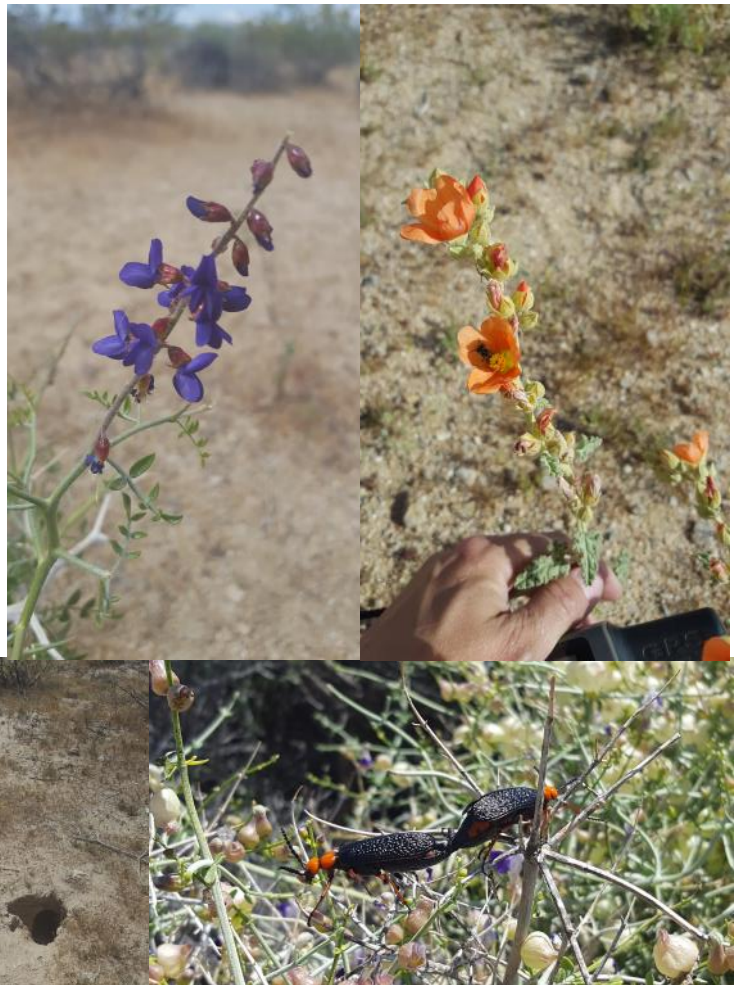


LAND MANAGEMENT

Spring Land Monitoring Commences

As with every year, this spring we have begun our annual land monitoring for our properties. Due to the vast amount of rain southern California received over the winter (approximately 3.5 inches in January alone), an array of wildflowers were in bloom. The abundance of wildflowers sparked an increase in insect activity and some very plump looking lizards. Land monitoring will continue this fall, enabling us to keep an eye on our land and log changes in habitat and signs of trespass.

(Top Left: Indigo Bush, Top Right: Apricot Mallow
Bottom Left: new Kit Fox den inside restoration area,
Bottom Right: A pair of numerous Master Blister
observed Beetles mating and foraging on a Paper bag
bush)



29 New sites of Barstow Woolly Sunflower found at DTRNA and expansion areas

The Barstow woolly sunflower is a California endemic and is a CNPS List 1B plant, a plant that is rare, threatened, or endangered in California. It occupies desert chenopod scrub, Mojavean desert scrub, and desert playas, occurring mostly in open, silty or sandy areas, barren ridges, or margins of playas between 1640 ft. and 2952 ft. in elevation. The known range of this member of the Aster family is very restricted, with known occurrences in eastern Kern county and western San Bernardino county.

A previous search for the Barstow Woolly Sunflower in 2011 found seven sites were found within the Desert Tortoise Research Natural Area. This year the DTPC again recruited Denise LaBerteaux to continue the search within the Desert Tortoise Research Natural Area and its expansion areas. The survey was conducted from March 19– March 30. Twenty nine new sites have been found on the Desert Tortoise Research Natural Area including one site just within the new restoration area that was just fenced this past winter. Most locations had less than 100 plants, however two sites had 600 –800 plants!

Each new finding of this species is crucial to its existence, and knowing that there are close to thirty current plants within protected areas will help us protect and research this species and perhaps gain additional protection for the DTRNA and surrounding areas.



OUTREACH

Desert Tortoise Days

April 29th was the annual Desert Tortoise Day in California City. This event brings the local community together to celebrate the species which resides just outside of town. The Desert Tortoise Preserve Committee had a booth which educated the public on threats to the desert tortoise and what our organization does to help mitigate those threats. California Turtle & Tortoise Club–Ridgecrest attended the event with us to display live tortoises and to educate the public about responsible ownership and care of captive tortoises. Due to the proximity of the Desert Tortoise Research Natural Area to town, outreach to California City is incredibly important. The DTPC wishes to increase visitation to the DTRNA by California City residents and to involve more of the community with our stewardship and education programs.



Presentations

The DTPC is working hard to increase the number of educational presentations that are given at other nature-based organizations as well as schools. So far, presentations have been given to the California Turtle & Tortoise Club– Inland Empire chapter and the Kern county Audubon chapter with other California Turtle and Tortoise Club presentations scheduled. Additionally, on May 19, a presentation was given to sixth and seventh graders at Western Center Academy in Hemet to celebrate Endangered Species Day and to discuss what our organization is doing to protect the desert tortoise.

Spectrum News Story

On March 28 Spectrum News, out of Palmdale, California, visited the Desert Tortoise Research Natural Area to film a short story about the DTRNA, the DTPC, and our efforts to protect Desert tortoises. The story brought to light the threats which tortoises are facing including the growing number of ravens, and what is being done to protect them. A link to the news piece can be found on our website.



A lot of the land management we do could not be done without our dedicated volunteers. Tasks such as trash removal, fence surveying and repair, weed control, land monitoring, and outreach event attendance help us manage our land and gain more support. Here are a few upcoming opportunities that are in need of volunteers.

Upcoming Volunteer Opportunities:

Fence Monitoring:

The DTPC is seeking able-bodied volunteers to help monitor the almost 50 miles of fencing that surrounds the DTRNA and adjacent properties. Monitoring would consist of driving as well as hiking and repairing any damage to the fence.

Land Monitoring:

The DTPC is obligated to visit and monitor more than 6,000 acres of land each year. We are looking for trained or untrained volunteers to help visit these parcels which are scattered throughout Kern, San Bernardino, and Riverside counties. Land monitoring will resume this fall once temperatures decline.

If you are interested in volunteering your time for any of these events, please email us at dtpc@pacbell.net



DTPC Calendar of Events & Volunteer Opportunities

- June 12—Presentation at CTTC-Bakersfield (Bakersfield, CA)
- June 23— DTPC Board Meeting (Ridgecrest, CA)
- October 21 - Fall Work Party (DTRNA)

The DTPC would like to thank the following people for attending the spring work party:

Bonny Ahern	Deanne Edridge	John Krafczyk	Karena Massengill	Michael Skibsted
Tom Astle	Tina Erway	Jake Jansen	John Miller	Russel Skibsted
Craig Bansmer	Meghann Gili	Larry Jansen	Terry Miller	Faith Strailey
Franklin Bedard	Rex Harding	Michele Jansen	Edwin Momeny	Piers Strailey
Bruce Biesman-Simons	Chuck Hemingway	Nicole Jansen	Ella Momeny	Martin Thomas
Kyle Boone	Linda Huffman	Reese Jansen	Rachelle Momeny	Nancy Thomas
Rodney Boone	Marlene Ishii	Sage Jansen	Lily Parsons	Rachel Woodard
Al Edridge	Steve Ishii	Karen Jefchak	Freya Reder	Carrie Woods
	Ian Kimbrey	Vincent LaVeque	Graham Robertson	Dave Zantiny

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

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Greg Lathrop at 2redgrey@gmail.com or (415) 637-7187 for instruction

Let's grow the endowment!

- ☐ I would like my contribution to remain anonymous
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Please make your check payable to DTPC and mail to:

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Thank you.

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If you would like to renew your membership or donate online, please visit * www.tortoise-tracks.org *



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check under your vehicle for wildlife.**

