



Fall 2018  
Edition 38: 3

# Tortoise Tracks

Newsletter



*Photo by Tina Erway*

## EVENTS

# Please join us for the **Desert Tortoise Preserve Committee Annual Fall Work Party**

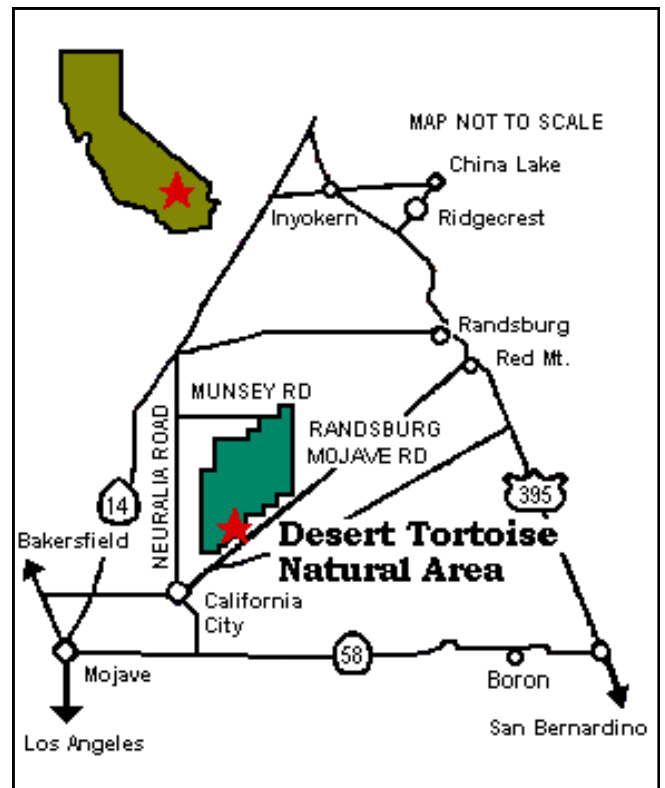
**Saturday, September 29**  
**from 9am to 2pm**  
**at the**  
**Desert Tortoise Research**  
**Natural Area**  
in coordination with BLM  
National Public Lands Day

**50 volunteers needed**

(Sunday work is TBD  
depending on availability of volunteers)

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

Please **RSVP** to this event by  
calling (951) 683-3872 or email  
[dtpc@pacbell.net](mailto:dtpc@pacbell.net)







Dedicated to the recovery and conservation of the Desert Tortoise (*Gopherus agassizii*) and other rare and endangered species inhabiting the Mojave and western Sonoran deserts.

**The  
Desert Tortoise  
Preserve Committee, Inc.**  
Founded 1974  
**Board of Directors**

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

**Preserve Manager &  
Conservation Coordinator**  
Jillian Estrada

**Director of Land Acquisition**  
Jun Lee

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



Tortoise Tracks is published  
four times a year.

## Wildlife Conservation Network Expo

October 13, 2018

San Francisco, CA

Tickets on sale August 23

[Wildlife Conservation Network Website](http://www.wildlifeconservationnetwork.org)

Enjoy presentations by some of the world's  
leading conservationists and tables representing  
dozens of conservation organizations

## Twenty-Seventh Desert Tortoise Council Fall Course Introduction to Desert Tortoises and Field Techniques will be held

November 3–4, 2018

Pinnacles Room at the Kerr McGee Center

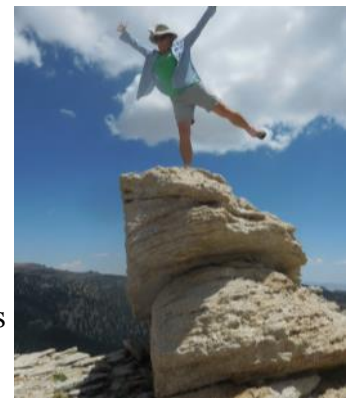
100 W. California Ave.

Ridgecrest, CA

[Course Website](http://www.dtcp.org)

## Meet a Director: Rachel Woodard, Secretary

Rachel Woodard grew up in Illinois, and earned her BA in the prairie on the road to becoming a contracting field biologist. Her professional biology career has centered on desert tortoises in California and Nevada since 1994. Study plots, surveys, Line Distance sampling, clearances and translocations, botanical surveys and various research projects have kept her walking in all parts of the tortoise's range. Translocations for solar developments in the Mojave Desert have been the focus of her work for Ironwood Consulting in recent years. Ms. Woodard has been a volunteer instructor for both the Desert Tortoise Council's Tortoise Techniques Workshop (2000-present), and the US Fish and Wildlife Services' Desert Tortoise Health Assessment Training. She is permitted to work with Mohave Ground Squirrel, and regularly participates in volunteer MGS trapping and bird banding. Rachel resides in rural Kern County when she is not in the field or journeying on her frequent travel.



*Photo provided by  
Rachel Woodard*

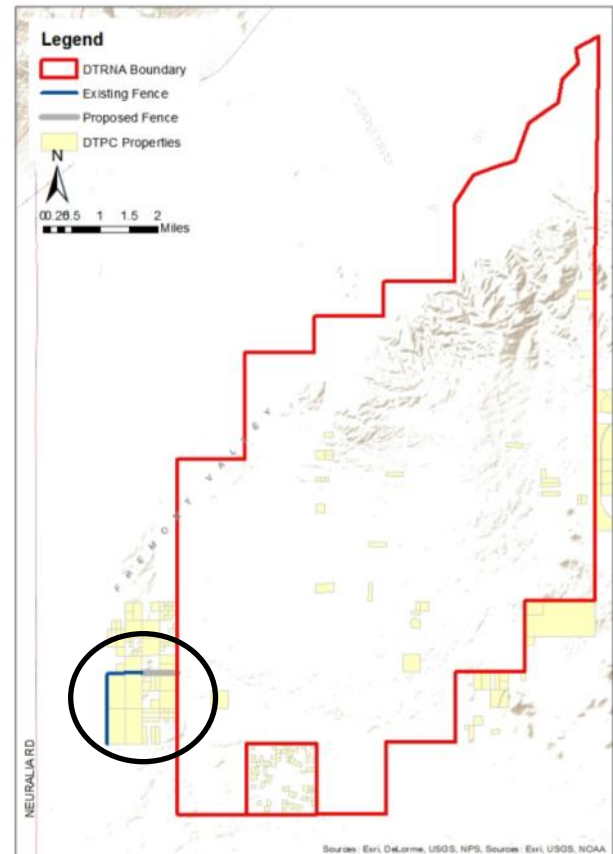
## LAND MANAGEMENT

### New Grants Awarded to the Desert Tortoise Preserve Committee

2018 has turned out to be just as successful as 2017. This year we have been awarded two new grants that will help with education and restoration. The Desert Tortoise Preserve Committee relies on donor contributions as well as grants to fund our various stewardship and education activities, so these grants are incredibly important.

This year for the 2018 California State Parks Off-Highway Motor Vehicle Recreation Division grant season, we submitted a grant to complete fencing and restoration efforts on a 640 acre section in the Western Expansion Area. This section was partially fenced in early 2018 with the help of the 2017 OHV grant we were awarded. This additional fencing will completely enclose the area which is unfortunately still accessible to Off-highway vehicles in the eastern portion of the section. Because the section is located adjacent to a designated OHV route, it is very important to finish the fence line and begin restoration activities. The tortoise population in the western expansion area is lower than within the Desert Tortoise Research Natural Area; however we hope to see an increasing trend as we continue to protect the area.

In addition to our restoration grant, we were awarded the 2018 Outdoor Environmental Education Facility Grant. This is a one-time grant program which provides funding for projects aiming to build or update outdoor environmental education facilities throughout California. We were selected among an impressive group of organizations building or updating nature centers and interpretive materials. With this funding we will be updating the panels at the Desert Tortoise Research Natural Area interpretive center. The original panels are close to forty years old and contain outdated information. Current visitors can learn a lot about desert inhabitants and specifically the desert tortoise; however we would like to include more relevant information about desert tortoises, desert ecology, and conservation efforts. The new information will help educate a new generation of desert visitors and hopefully improve their awareness about the plight of desert tortoises and their habitat.



Location of fall 2018 restoration work (shown in light grey)



Interpretive Center kiosk (Photo by Jill Estrada)





## Land Management: It's more than just installing fences

The past few years have been excitingly busy with fence installation in the eastern and western Expansion Areas of the Desert Tortoise Research Natural Area. Since 2016, we have installed approximately 18 miles of tortoise inclusion fencing which allows wildlife to travel normally across borders but protects the some 3,300 acres of land from human-related threats. This type of fencing has proven to work well and last for an impressive length of time but it does require monitoring and maintenance, especially during the first few years post-installation.

The past year has in part been spent rigorously monitoring our new fencing and repairing any instances of fence damage or vandalism. So far in 2018, we have observed and repaired 15 of these instances, totaling approximately 400 feet of damaged fencing. Each repair can require additional fence wire, fence ties, t-posts, and signage which over time can become very costly. Every fence cut or bent post creates an opportunity for trespass that can have significant consequences to the restoration process that is taking place on these newly protected lands. Therefore, fence damage must be found and dealt with quickly to reduce the amount of trespass and damage done to the habitat.

Every management practice we undertake receives careful consideration and discussion before any action takes place. Land management is adaptive and requires extensive knowledge and awareness of the ecosystem and how it is being used. We rely on our staff and volunteers to help us keep informed of any changes in the ecosystem (observed via our annual land monitoring) and uses of the land surrounding the Desert Tortoise Research Natural Area. Each year we take these observations into account when modifying management practices and writing new habitat management plans.

If you would like to join our group of dedicated volunteers, please contact us at [dtpc@pacbell.net](mailto:dtpc@pacbell.net).



Newly protected land within Eastern Expansion Area



Newly protected land within Western Expansion Area

Fence Damage  
Before



Fence Damage  
After



Our electronic newsletter is growing in popularity and we want to see it continue to grow! One added benefit of receiving the e-newsletter is that it is provided in color and is received sooner than those that are mailed. If you would like to be added to our e-newsletter list, please email us at [dtpc@pacbell.net](mailto:dtpc@pacbell.net).

## Desert Ants—Laura Stockton

During the months that follow spring plant growth and the heightened wildlife activity it is more challenging to observe tortoises and other wildlife among the shrubs and dry annuals. However, ant rings that surround ant nest openings can be easily seen and are reminders of active subterranean ant communities. These ant colonies often have populations of hundreds of thousands produced by a single queen and extend for an acre. The nest can be several feet deep with several openings to the surface. It is estimated worldwide that ants are 15-20% of the terrestrial animal biomass. So ants are a significant part of most ecosystems including the desert. Like desert plants and animals, the desert ants are uniquely adapted to the challenges of desert living.

There are 15-20 species of ants at the DTRNA, with harvester species being the most prominent. The Black Harvester (*Veromessor pergandei*) nest opening includes a bare area surrounded by a ring of discarded seed pods along the outer margin. The well-organized foraging teams of female worker ants harvest seeds from a number of plant species. The seeds are stored in underground galleries. The harvester ants have significant roles in the desert ecosystem including seed dispersal, increasing soil fertility and as a food source for birds, lizards and spiders. Harvester ants are the primary diet of the Desert Horned Lizard (*Phrynosoma platyrhinos calidarium*).

Frequently you can see ant carcasses hanging from the short grass that grows just outside the harvester nest opening refuse ring. Spiders, including the Western Widow (*Latrodectus Hesperus*), prey on ants at the nest opening and hang the captured ants from the grass for later consumption. Harvesters adjust their use of nest openings and harvesting activities in response to spider predation threats.



Black Harvester Ants—Photo by George Veltchev

The Honey Ant (*myrmecocystus sp.*) is one of the most unique ants found at the DTRNA. The nest openings do not have the outer ring of discarded seed pods like the harvesters, but are surrounded by bare soil. The night foraging workers collect plant honeydew and nectar. It is then stored in the abdomens of specialized workers called repletes that hang in underground galleries as “honeypots”. The “honeypot” abdomens resemble peas in size and shape and can be 8 up to times the weight of the ant. When food is not available, the antennae of the repletes are touched by others worker as signals to regurgitate the stored honey.



Honey Ant Replete

## Join us for our 44th Annual Meeting

Interested in what the Desert Tortoise Preserve Committee does throughout the year? Curious about meeting our staff and members of the Board? Our annual meeting is an opportunity for members to learn more about our organization, current events in tortoise conservation, and to spend an exciting afternoon mingling with fellow tortoise and desert lovers. Please consider attending this event on **Saturday, January 19, 2019** at The Lancaster Columbus Club, Knights of Columbus, Lancaster, CA

## DTPC Calendar of Events & Volunteer Opportunities

- All summer—Fence monitoring at DTRNA
- September 29, 2018—Fall Work Party
- October 13, 2018—Wildlife Conservation Network Expo (San Francisco)
- November 3-4, 2018—DTC Tortoise Handling Course (Ridgecrest)
- January 19, 2019—DTPC Annual Meeting

## 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:

- ☐ \$25 Individual  
☐ \$40 Family  
☐ \$75 Sponsor

- ☐ \$100 Benefactor  
☐ \$200 Patron/Corporate  
☐ \$1000 Life Membership

2. My membership is current but here is an additional donation of \$\_\_\_\_\_.  
 Please use it for:

- ☐ Fencing                      ☐ Land Acquisition                      ☐ Where Most Needed  
☐ Other: \_\_\_\_\_

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

- ☐ \$250                                      ☐ \$2,500  
☐ \$500                                      ☐ \$5,000  
☐ \$1,000                                      ☐ Other \$ \_\_\_\_\_  
☐ Marketable Securities (Stock): Contact DTPC Finance Committee Chairperson, Greg Lathrop at [2redgrey@gmail.com](mailto:2redgrey@gmail.com) or (415) 637-7187 for instruction

Let's grow the endowment!

- ☐ I would like my contribution to remain anonymous  
☐ I would like to receive Tortoise Tracks electronically (please provide email address)

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.

If you would like to renew your membership or donate online, please visit \* [www.tortoise-tracks.org](http://www.tortoise-tracks.org) \*



# Tortoise Tracks

THE DESERT TORTOISE PRESERVE COMMITTEE  
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Electronic copies of *Tortoise Tracks* are in **COLOR**!  
If you would prefer to receive an electronic copy, notify us  
by email at [dtpc@pacbell.net](mailto:dtpc@pacbell.net)

## Volunteer Corner

### Volunteer Needs:

WCN Expo—We are looking for 1-2 volunteers to attend the Wildlife Conservation Network Expo with us on October 13. The event takes place in San Francisco where we will have a table promoting our work.

Fence Monitoring—The DTPC owns and manages more than 50 miles of fencing in and around the DTRNA and expansion areas which need to be monitored and repaired as needed.

Land Monitoring— We are in need of trained land monitoring teams to help us tackle the task of monitoring our parcels. Monitoring will resume this fall. If you would like to become trained, please contact us at [dtpc@pacbell.net](mailto:dtpc@pacbell.net)