



Fall 2020
Edition 40:3

Tortoise Tracks

Newsletter

The DTPC Translocates to Ridgecrest



Photo by: Sophia Osho

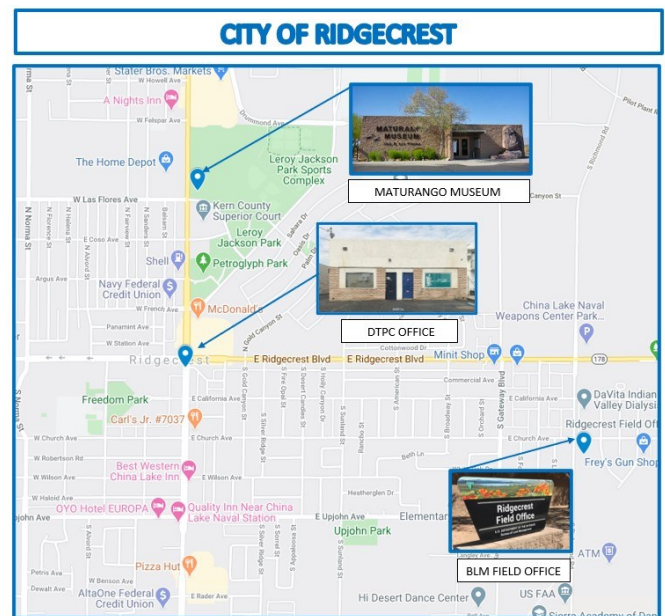


Photo by: Sophia Osho

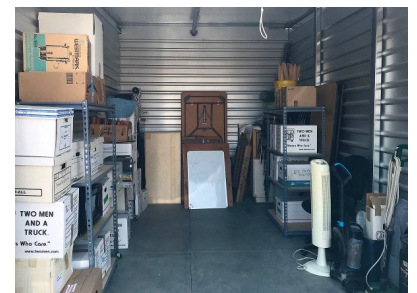


Photo by: Sophia Osho

After spending more than 20 years in Riverside, the Desert Tortoise Preserve Committee, Inc. has found a home in the heart of Ridgecrest, CA! This new office is conveniently located closer to the [DTRNA](#) and between our friends and partners, the [Maturango Museum](#) and the [Bureau of Land Management, Ridgecrest Field Office](#).



The preparations for our change of location were carried out by a vibrant group of volunteers and Board Members. Organizing and packing up the Riverside office was our team of volunteers **Laura Stockton**, **Kristin Berry**, and **Kathy Simon**. **Ron Berger** managed the lease negotiation, logistical direction for the movers, and secured new storage facilities in Ridgecrest. **Jun Lee** provided oversight of the lease drafting. **Jane McEwan** – where to begin – helped us secure the space, donated much of the furniture, helped with logistics, kindly met with the Mediacom account managers onsite to ensure the Ridgecrest office had phone and internet service. **Rachel Woodard** secured the office keys and established our post office box in our new location, as well as showing up every time someone needed to install anything. July 23rd, **Laura Stockton** and **Sophia Osho** welcomed the movers to our Ridgecrest office and set about placing furniture and directing the placement of historic files in our new office space and storage unit.



August 4th **Steve and Marlene Ishii** joined Sophia and Laura in the office to install and set up the computers and printers. August 23rd Kristin and Laura made the long drive to Ridgecrest for in-office training. The most trips to Ridgecrest award goes to Laura for 5 visits!

A big thanks to each of our volunteers for their efforts and time getting us from Riverside to Ridgecrest.



Photo by: Sophia Osho

WINNERS OF THE PHOTOGRAPHY CONTEST IN 2020

This year was a tough one for our photographers, because the [Desert Tortoise Research Natural Area](#) was closed during most of the spring due to the corona virus. It was especially difficult when the wildflowers were blooming and many of us wanted to be travelling to the Natural Area to see them. Nevertheless, we have winners in four categories! Two people provided exceptional photographs. These photos are a fine addition to the collection of photographs for the Natural Area, and we show two of them below. Others will be featured in future newsletter, brochures and on the website.

LANDSCAPES/OTHER: **Linda Huffman** received a First Place for a sunset and Second Place for a nature trail with fields of drying alkali goldfields.

FLOWERS: **Linda Huffman** received First Place for a lacy phacelia.

BIRDS: **Gary Skipper II** received First Place for a Lesser Nighthawk.

MOHAVE GROUND SQUIRREL: **Gary Skipper II** received the Sweepstakes for a collection of incredible photographs of the species at its burrow, collecting plant materials, and stretching its body into the low hanging branches of a creosote bush, possibly to feed on fruits or flowers.

One of the Sweepstakes Collection of Photographs



Photo by: Gary Skipper II

The Mohave Ground Squirrel shown here with plant materials in its mouth was probably gathering nesting materials for its summer or winter burrow. Mohave Ground Squirrels are listed as threatened species by the State of California under the California Endangered Species Act. They have a limited geographic range, the smallest of any ground squirrel in North America. The range is entirely restricted to the western parts of the Mojave Desert in California. Much of their range has been degraded from multiple human activities and continues to deteriorate or be lost due to development for housing, roads, and solar energy development. Fortunately, their habitat is protected on the Natural Area and they are a day-time active squirrel. They often can be seen in springtime while walking the trails. They estivate in summer during the hot months and hibernate in winter, and primarily are above ground in late winter and spring.

The photograph of the Lesser Nighthawk was taken on open ground, typical of where they are often observed nesting. This is a nocturnal species, flying low over the desert to catch insects, the staple food. Note the small beak, the long wings, and how this species is camouflaged with the desert floor and not easily seen except by an astute observer. The Lesser nighthawk lays 2 eggs on open ground, on sand or gravel, with no nest. This one may be incubating eggs.



Photo by: Gary Skipper II

The DTPC would like to provide a heartfelt "thank you" to Dr. Kristin Berry for her special donation that covered 100% of the winner prizes and all of the costs for this contest.

Publication of a Long-term Study on Changes in Tortoise Populations Inside and Outside the Fenced Natural Area

Kristin H. Berry, U.S. Geological Survey, Western Ecological Research Center,
Riverside, California. Email kristin_berry@usgs.gov

In 1978, while fence construction was underway around the perimeter of the Desert Tortoise Research Natural Area, I began planning for a long-term research project to determine the effects of the fence on the Natural Area and on the desert tortoise population. Questions at the time were: 1) will more tortoises be present inside than outside the fence after several years? 2) will the removal of recreational and other vehicles and sheep have positive effects on the tortoise population and habitat? and 3) will the presence of the interpretive center kiosk, parking lot, and nature trails have positive or negative effects on the tortoise population? The study began in spring of 1979, an intensive effort requiring 180 person-days of surveys over the 3 square mile plot (1.75 sq. miles inside the fence and 1.25 sq. miles outside). Subsequently, the surveys were repeated 6 more times with 2012 as the endpoint after 34 years. In the intervening years, additional topics were added when excessive predation by ravens and upper respiratory disease were discovered.

Over the study spanning 34 years, we documented a catastrophic decline of the tortoise population. Catastrophic declines for long-lived turtle and tortoise populations are defined in the scientific literature as short-term declines of more than 50% of the turtle population. Throughout the geographic range of the desert tortoise, catastrophic declines have been documented by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and other entities. The Natural Area population inside the fence has shown signs of recovery since 2002 and by 2012 was 2.5 times greater than outside the fence and similarly greater than in the adjacent critical habitat unit in the western Mojave Desert and elsewhere in most of the geographic range.

We identified four drivers of the population decline: 1) loss of tortoises from collecting, vandalism (including gunshot deaths), and vehicle kills; 2) habitat fragmentation and deterioration outside the fence; 3) hyper-predation by common ravens; and 4) infectious disease (upper respiratory disease). Two of these, loss of tortoises and habitat deterioration and fragmentation were related to the fence, with the greatest damage outside the fence. The third and fourth drivers affected the Natural Area and many other areas within the geographic range. Both the upper respiratory disease caused by the bacterial pathogen *Mycoplasma agassizii* and excessive predation by ravens were first identified at the Natural Area.

The Desert Tortoise Research Natural Area is one of two places better protected than elsewhere in the geographic range. The other site is the Red Cliffs Desert Reserve in Utah. This summer the Red Cliffs Desert Reserve experienced a devastating, human-caused fire. The Red Cliffs Desert Reserve is small and may be unable to sustain such losses to the tortoise population and severe damage to habitat.

Our study provided several implications for managing desert tortoises and their habitats, including the importance of protective fencing. The Desert Tortoise Recovery Team made fencing one of its recommendations in the first recovery plan for the tortoise, published in 1994.

For those of you wishing to learn more details about the study, the publication reference is: Berry, K.H., J. L Yee, T.A. Shields, and L. Stockton. 2020. The Catastrophic Decline of Tortoises at a Fenced Natural Area. *Wildlife Monographs* 205:1-53. The article is available online and from Kristin Berry at the above email address.

Please Welcome Sophia Osho to the DTPC Team



Sophia Osho joined the Desert Tortoise Preserve Committee, Inc. on August 3rd to fill the newly created position of Executive Administrator. Sophia will manage the day to day administrative responsibilities along with grant writing, growing our donor and volunteer base, and partnering with the DTPC Preserve Manager in hosting the annual Spring and Fall Work Parties. Sophia recently moved to Ridgecrest, California from Raleigh, North Carolina where she lived for 15 years and worked in the fast-paced commercial construction industry as a Project Manager's Assistant and Executive Administrative Assistant. On her spare time Sophia enjoys exploring the Sierra Nevada west and northwest of the office where her passion for the outdoors and camping can be fully realized.

Special Recognitions

With the cancellation of the 2020 45th Anniversary Annual Meeting and Banquet, the presentation of the special recognition awards was postponed. Four individuals were to be recognized: **Marlene Ishii, Steve Ishii, Allan Eggleton** and **Ciara Frassinelli**.

Marlene and Steve each receive a personalized walking stick in recognition of over 20 years of work with Desert Tortoise Preserve Committee (DTPC) as individuals and as a great team. They both have served on the DTPC Board and continue to contribute their considerable technical expertise to DTPC operations. Marlene and Steve have attended and helped coordinate many work parties. In fact, we would like to thank Marlene for putting this newsletter together. Land monitoring is another area of tremendous contributions from onsite monitoring to program logistics and to training other volunteers on how to monitor and document.

Allan has missed few, if any, spring and fall work parties over the last several years. He is usually the first to start and the last to quit on any of the varied tasks that are done during these events. He was awarded a special photo plaque.

Ciara spent a great deal of time in 2019 perfecting plant drawings for interpretive and brochure uses. She was also awarded a special photo plaque.

*This beautiful tortoise sculpture was donated to the DTPC by **Mary Jane McEwan**. Jane's father hand-carved this amazing piece and it now sits proudly at the new DTPC Ridgecrest office for visitors to enjoy.*



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

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Treasurer	Laura Stockton
Recording Secretary	Rachel Woodard
Board Member	Kristin Berry, Ph.D.
Board Member	Greg Lathrop
Board Member	Larry Nelson
Board Member	Kathy Simon
Board Member	Dave Zantiny

Executive Administrator

Sophia Osho

Director of Land Acquisition

Jun Lee

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Tortoise Tracks is published four times a year.

Fall Work Party Cancelled

Every Fall we look forward to gathering with our volunteers to participate in stewardship projects, land monitoring and enjoying our desert ecosystem. Given the growing concerns around COVID-19, the Desert Tortoise Preserve Committee, Inc. has made the decision to cancel the Fall Work Party.

The safety of our volunteers and staff is our highest priority. Status for upcoming events can be found on our website at tortoise-tracks.org. If you have any questions, please contact us at dtpc@tortoise-tracks.org.

Thank you for your continued support.



DTPC Volunteer Ideas During the Covid-19 Pandemic

Article by Bonnie Ahern

Fall is the time when I feel the change in the desert weather encourages us to make a fresh assessment of the months just past. What did we miss? What did we accomplish? And, most importantly, what's next?

In this strange, nay bizarre, time I can list what I have missed most: doing significant work in the desert and seeing my fellow desert volunteers and friends. In March the DTPC wisely cancelled the in-person Annual Meeting and the 45th Anniversary Celebration and has just made the same smart decision: cancelling the Fall Work Party.

We will all miss the work party very much but we know that our first responsibility is to keep ourselves and our fellow humans safe. There is no way to travel all the way to and from a work party without interacting with the environment outside your car – stopping to use the restroom, stopping for gas, getting carry out food, a bag of ice, or a drive thru coffee. All of these are individually relatively low risk activities (if you are very careful) but multiply that risk by 20 to 25 people, some who come from up to 300 miles away, and now you see a significant accumulated risk. Add to that, everyone arriving in a small town which has a large percentage of at-risk residents and limited medical resources and you can see that our actions could have an unintended negative effect on this vulnerable community. Let's not do that, okay?

I can also list what we have accomplished in these past months but you will be able to read about those in much more detail elsewhere in this newsletter. But in short – some really stellar accomplishments!

As to what's next – the list is almost endless! Volunteers are champing at the bit to get involved (virtually, not physically) with many different aspects of the organization.

Possibilities for outreach and education can include videos, creating a Wikipedia page, photo archives, and children's activity kits.

Possibilities for increasing membership can include utilizing all forms of social media and partnering with other like-minded organizations.

Possibilities for fundraising can include reaching out to corporations who may not be aware of the opportunities the DTPC can offer and floating small, interesting projects on GoFundMe and other similar sites.

So, despite the bizarreness of the current situation, there is a lot to look forward to and a lot of ways we can all continue to do the good work of the DTPC right from our own homes and even right from our own couches!

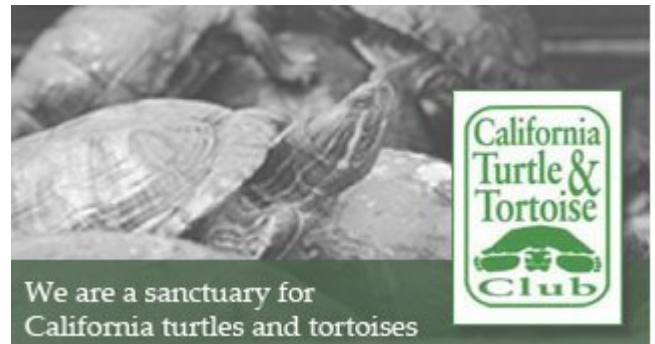
Care for Domestic & Injured Tortoises

The Desert Tortoise Preserve Committee, Inc. receives a number of calls pertaining to the care and rescue of the desert tortoise. While the DTPC does not participate in the care, or rescue of the desert tortoise, [California Turtle & Tortoise Club](http://CaliforniaTurtleandTortoiseClub.org) is dedicated to preservation, conservation, and education.

“Each year, California Turtle and Tortoise Club Adoption Committees place hundreds of abandoned, lost, seized, injured or diseased turtles and tortoises that have been turned in by other humane organizations, members of the public, local and federal government officers and veterinarians. These animals are treated, if sick, and are then placed as quickly as possible into suitable homes.

If you reside IN CALIFORNIA and have an animal that you need to place in a new home, or have questions about CTTC's Adoption Program, please contact your local Chapter. Click on the links under the heading 'CTTC Chapter Contact Information' to contact your chapter by email. Please provide your – or the animal's – location, species, gender, age/size and number of animals in your request for assistance.”

To find a chapter of The California Turtle & Tortoise Club in your area please visit their website at www.tortoise.org.



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Sign up to receive the *Tortoise Tracks* newsletter electronically! Recipients will obtain the newsletter immediately after publication and will be able view the beautiful pictures in each edition in **COLOR**. This method reduces paper usage and is better for our environment.

To receive electronic copies of the newsletter, please notify us by email at dtpc@tortoise-tracks.org.

GO GREEN

Calendar of Events:

October 17—DTPC Virtual Board Meeting

January 30, 2021—DTPC Annual Meeting and Banquet. Location to be determined.

(NOTE: Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the date for this event may change.)

Desert Tortoise Week has been rescheduled for **October 5 through October 11, 2020**. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service will be advertising the event as a virtual celebration of the species. We hope to take advantage of our social media presence educating folks through that platform. Expect facts of the day, social media photo challenges, and virtual presentations. Visit their website <https://wildlife.ca.gov/> for details.

Desert Tortoise Preserve Committee, Inc.

PO Box 940 – Ridgecrest, CA 93556

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www.tortoise-tracks.org



Subject: Desert Tortoise Found in the Amazon!

Dear Member,

As a loyal member you know very well that that the Mojave desert tortoise (*Gopherus agassizii*) is a keystone species of the Mojave and Sonoran deserts north and west of the Colorado River in southwestern Utah, southern Nevada, southeastern California, and northwestern Arizona in the United States, and certainly not in the Amazonian tropical rainforest.

However, there is one special place where you can help protect the desert tortoise by registering with Amazon Smile (www.smile.amazon.com). Once you register you will be able to select our organization by searching for “desert tortoise preserve committee”. Every time you purchase from Amazon Smile the DTPC will receive 0.5% of your qualified purchased through the AmazonSmile Foundation.

By simply registering and purchasing through Amazon Smile you can contribute to the DTPC’s 45 years of conservation efforts at no extra cost to you. The collective impact of our members’ contribution in this program could be significant. For example, if the receipt from our members purchases reach \$10,000 over time, then we will receive funding to **acquire over 2,000 square feet of desert tortoise habitat, build 17 linear feet of protective fencing, refurbish 5 signs to protect against trespass, and host 2 visitors at the Desert Tortoise Research Natural Area.** Every purchase helps and every dollar toward desert tortoise conservation is impactful.

All the Best

Ron Berger, President



If you shop on smile.amazon.com using an internet browser on your desktop or laptop computer, your mobile phone, or your tablet, then your purchases of eligible products (marked “eligible for AmazonSmile donation” on the detail pages) will result in donations. If you shop on your Amazon Shopping app, with AmazonSmile ‘active’ (your app must be active for AmazonSmile when you make the purchase), then your purchases of eligible products (marked “eligible for AmazonSmile donation” on the detail pages) will result in donations. Purchases that are not made using these methods, (like purchases through a Kindle store, Fire devices, Amazon physical stores, Amazon Dash, or Alexa-enabled devices) are not currently eligible for any donation benefits.



Tortoise Tracks

THE DESERT TORTOISE PRESERVE COMMITTEE
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RIDGECREST, CALIFORNIA 93556

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When you shop [@AmazonSmile](#), and select the DTPC as your charity, Amazon will make a donation to the DTPC!
<http://smile.amazon.com/ch/23-7413415>



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If you would prefer to receive an electronic copy, notify us by email at dtpc@tortoise-tracks.org

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"/> \$25 Individual | <input type="checkbox"/> \$75 Sponsor | <input type="checkbox"/> \$200 Patron/Corporate |
| <input type="checkbox"/> \$40 Family | <input type="checkbox"/> \$100 Benefactor | <input type="checkbox"/> \$1000 Life Membership |

2. My membership is current but here is an additional donation 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 Permanent Endowment. Please accept an additional donation of:

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

Let's grow the Permanent Endowment!

- | | |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> I would like my contribution to remain anonymous | <input type="checkbox"/> I would like to receive <i>Tortoise Tracks</i> 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
PO Box 940
Ridgecrest, CA 93556.

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 *