



Spring 2021  
Edition 41:1

# Tortoise Tracks

Newsletter

## 2021 Naturalist Season!



The 2021 Naturalist season at the Desert Tortoise Natural Area (DTRNA) was made possible through our partnership with the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), Friends of Jawbone, and the Desert Tortoise Preserve Committee (DTPC) board members who stepped in to review resumes, hold interviews, and be onsite to direct the placement of trailers for our Interpretive and Naturalist Trailers. Scott Shupe, a free-lance naturalist of nearly forty



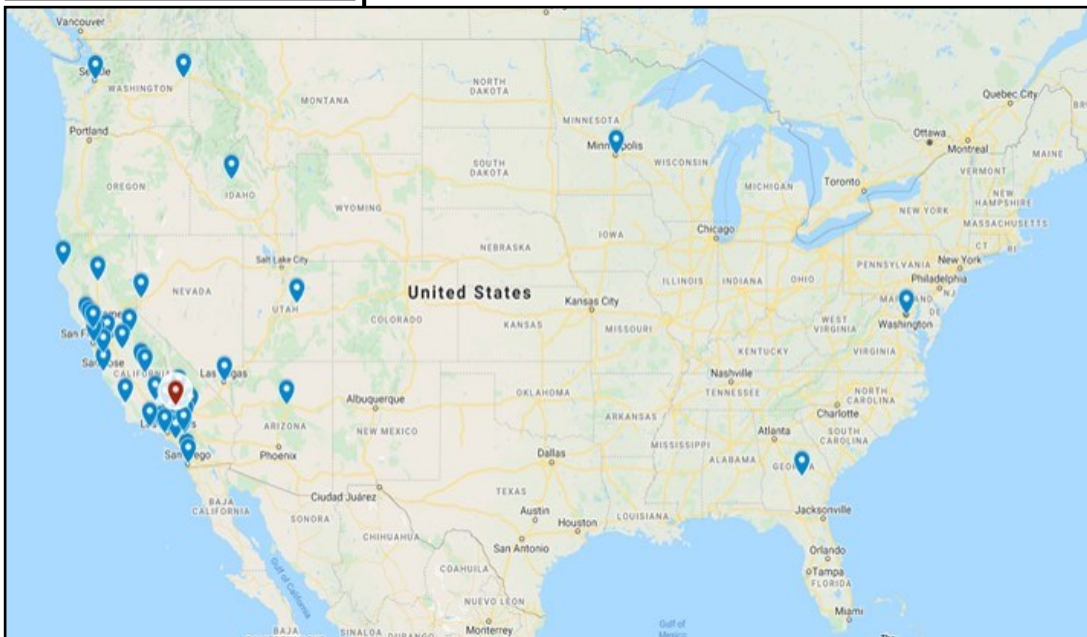
Scott Shupe

years, accepted the full time Naturalist position, and Lisa LaVelle returned for her 9th season at the DTRNA. Scott has nearly forty



Lisa LaVelle

years' experience in a wide array of nature interpretation, wildlife tourism, education, zoological exhibits administration, writing and wildlife photography and videography. He currently describes himself as a dedicated wanderer who roams the continent in search of new species to photograph. Lisa is a Naturalist who has a knack for locating tortoises and giving educational tours to tortoise enthusiasts who travel to learn about the Mojave tortoise. The Naturalist season runs March 22 – June 2 with visitors from all over the country (reflected in the map below) in just the first month of April! Drier conditions have meant less flowers than usual, however tortoises have been active and closely monitored by Scott and Lisa. We would like to thank Kathy Simon and



Rachel Woodard for reviewing resumes and holding interviews, Karen Sanders, a restoration crew supervisor for Friends of Jawbone, who generously towed the Naturalist Trailer, Clint Helms of the BLM for towing the Interpretive Trailer, Laura Stockton for supervision and Victoria Kline for volunteering to clean and organize once both trailers were set up.

## Preserve Manager and Conservation Coordinator

The Desert Tortoise Preserve Committee welcomed Austin Hulbert April 1st as our Preserve Manager and Conservation Coordinator. Among the many duties of this position Austin immediately began our Spring Raven monitoring efforts. Austin grew up in Alabama and attended Auburn University for his B.Sc. in Ecology. While at Auburn, he developed a passion for reptile conservation from his involvement in research labs. He then went on to receive his Master's in Ecology at the University of Toledo. Austin's graduate school research focused on the hatchling ecology of Eastern box turtles and spotted turtles. He is excited to continue working on turtle conservation with the Desert Tortoise Preserve Committee and is looking forward to experiencing the Mojave Desert. We would like to extend our thanks to Laura Stockton and Dr. Berry for their tireless work in screening and interviewing candidates for the Preserve Manager position.



## The DTPC Needs Your Financial Assistance

The dramatic decline in interest rates has adversely impacted the Desert Tortoise Preserve Committee (DTPC). The DTPC depends upon Endowment earnings to fund a significant part of our general overhead expenses each year. We experienced a 15% decline in Endowment earnings sadly in 2020. This will sadly only accelerate in 2021 as older investments mature. This was demonstrated by the 31% decline in Endowment earnings in the 4th quarter of 2020. **The only way to offset these declines at this time is to increase the size of our Permanent Endowment.** Your contributions to the Permanent Endowment of any size will help us greatly. In 2020 we received just over \$110,000 in new Permanent Endowment funds. We are currently at 14.25% of our \$3,000,000 campaign for new funds. In addition to cash, please consider us when making your 2021 IRA Required Minimum Distribution (RMD) or donating appreciated marketable securities. A strong Permanent Endowment helps to guarantee our survival into perpetuity. Thank you in advance for your kind support. Prepared by DTPC Finance Committee.

## 2021 Spring Land Acquisition Update by Jun Lee

During the first quarter of 2021, the Desert Tortoise Preserve Committee has been focused on acquiring and preparing a management plan for a 40 acre parcel within the Mojave National Preserve. This multi-agency effort involves the DTPC, Mojave Desert Land Trust, Caltrans, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service – to satisfy the federal and state mitigation requirements of the U.S. Interstate 95 Curve Alignment Project. The acquisition culminates permitting and planning processes that began in 2012 to conserve desert tortoise and streambed wash habitat.



## Fall Work Party, Save The Date

October 16th is the date of our Fall Work Party that offers a variety of work planned by our Preserve Manager, Austin. We recently added a volunteer application to our website that can be accessed through this link [Volunteer Application](#), or by going online to [www.tortoise-tracks.org](http://www.tortoise-tracks.org) and selecting the Join Us tab followed by Volunteer Opportunities. Categories for Fall Work Party needs include land monitoring, fence monitoring, sign installation, invasive species control and much more. You can also call our office at (442)-294-4258 with questions, or help with the application. Looking forward to seeing you in October!



## 2021 Spring Raven Monitoring

Ravens are a major threat to desert tortoise populations. Raven populations have exploded in the desert due to food and water resources within urban centers. Ravens will then move out into the further reaches of the desert, especially during their nesting season in the spring. Ravens will eat young tortoises before their shells are completely hardened or calcified. Additionally, ravens can also kill adult tortoises by pecking at their limbs and face. To protect tortoises, researchers are employing a variety of methods aimed at reducing raven populations.



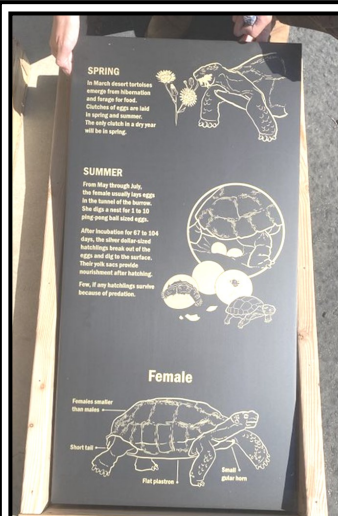
One such method is egg oiling; this suffocates the eggs and prevents them from hatching. Meanwhile, the raven parents still care for the eggs instead of laying another viable clutch. In collaboration



with Tim Shields from Hardshell Labs, the Desert Tortoise Preserve Committee (DTPC) started monitoring for raven nests to oil at the Desert Tortoise Natural Area (DTRNA) in spring 2020. This year, we continued to monitor raven nests that were oiled the previous year. Most of these nests occurred in Joshua trees on the hilly, north eastern portion of the DTRNA. This year, we saw very little nesting action from ravens, likely due to the extreme

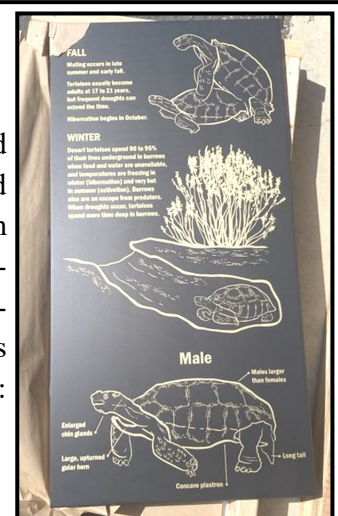
drought conditions. Altogether, we found only one active nest; however, this nest had quite a large clutch with 6 eggs! This drought will likely impose other hardships for the tortoises, but these dry conditions could prevent young tortoises from being eaten by ravens this year. Raven nest monitoring was made possible this year due to several volunteers that we would like to thank: Dr. Larry LaPre, Dave Danelski, Bonnie Ahern, Craig Bansmer, Elise Roberts, and Steve Roberts. Finally, the egg oiling itself is funded and managed by the United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS).

## Our New Kiosk Panels



The new Kiosk panels arrived and were recently opened for inspection by our Preserve Manager, Austin! Vivid tortoise drawings with updated scientific information gleamed bright as each was carefully unwrapped, photographed, and cataloged for installation at the Desert Tortoise Natural Area later this year. To see additional panels please follow this link to our DTRNA Facebook page:

[Facebook](#)





## Tom Astle Macro Photo Workshop



Do you wish you could take better closeups of the beautiful blooms and interesting insects you see in the great outdoors? Join us on Monday, July 19th, at 7 p.m. for an evening Zoom workshop on macro photography with photographer Tom Astle. Whether your outdoors is the Mojave Desert or simply your own balcony or backyard, macro photography is a great way to discover and appreciate the smaller things in life—insects and spiders, frogs and lizards, flowers and lichens. Tom has traveled the world with his camera, but

our Southern California deserts are where he spends the most time. His talk will feature exclusively SoCal images, including a number from the Desert Tortoise Research Natural Area. The evening is open to all ages and experience levels, from smartphone users to



people with DSLR or mirrorless cameras (or those thinking of buying one). Using his own photos as examples, Tom will cover general photography basics like lighting, exposure, and composition, with an emphasis on the particular challenges of macro shooting. He'll then open his equipment cupboard to



demonstrate some of the many gear choices, to help you get great results no matter your budget. Along with photography information, Tom will share the fascinating natural history he's



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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Tim Shields

learned about his photo subjects, and will share his thoughts on nature photography ethics an important topic to all people who love the natural world. After his presentation, Tom will answer questions, and provide a list of photography re-learn more. A version of this ned as an in-person event and April of 2020, but of course the pandemic put an end to that. Hopefully it can happen "in the meantime, join us on Zoom! but if you enjoy the evening, we make a donation to the Desert Preserve Committee. The 'suggested donation' amount is appreciated. All proceeds are being generously donated to the DTPC by Mr. Astle. To register for an invitation, please email Sophia Osho at [DTPC@tortoise-tracks.org](mailto:DTPC@tortoise-tracks.org).



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## In Memory of Jim Kenney

It is with heavy hearts that we bring you the news of the passing of the Public Lands Roundtable executive secretary James "Jim" Kenney. Jim was a vital member of the group and an invaluable resource as he always kept the membership abreast of news from the Bureau of Land Management. Bob Wood, former Vice President and Board Member of the Desert Tortoise Preserve Committee, said of Jim: "Jim's passing was sudden, but not unexpected. I liked Jim. He was a DAC member, member of Friends of Jawbone and PLR. I relied on his wisdom, long history of planning, recreation and politics in the Ridgecrest community. I couldn't have functioned as chairman of the PLR without him. He will be missed and hard to replace."

## OMVR - G-19 Grant

The Desert Tortoise Preserve Committee (DTPC) has long worked to expand the protected habitat of the Desert Tortoise Natural Area (DTRNA) and to better connect it to desert tortoise critical habitat in the region through land acquisition and stewardship in areas adjacent to the DTRNA.



Today, these Expansion Areas include about 5,000 acres owned and managed by the DTPC. Management is no small task! Multiple designated Off Highway Vehicle (OHV) routes run adjacent to the Expansion Areas and an extensive network of illegal trails has developed on mitigation lands throughout the area. In the past five years, the DTPC and its partners have installed about 21 miles of fencing around much of the habitat in the Expansion Areas to prevent illegal OHV trespass and damage. However, fence cuts and incursions continue to undermine the protection provided by the fencing and other unfenced properties remain open to impacts from unauthorized cross-country travel. Supported by funding from the California State Parks Off-Highway Motor Vehicle Recreation (OHMVR) Division, the DTPC and several partners have been busy monitoring and restoring lands in the DTRNA Expansion Areas this spring. The OHMVR Division awarded the DTPC a \$126,180 restoration grant to partially cover the costs of assessing and addressing impacts of OHV use on or adjacent to conservation lands for a two-

recreation (OHMVR) Division, the DTPC and several partners have been busy monitoring and restoring lands in the DTRNA Expansion Areas this spring. The OHMVR Division awarded the DTPC a \$126,180 restoration grant to partially cover the costs of assessing and addressing impacts of OHV use on or adjacent to conservation lands for a two-



year period. Work began in January and much has been accomplished!

A crew from the American Conservation Experience (ACE) arrived at the DTRNA in early March to conduct monitoring and restoration. Over the course of three eight-day hitches, this hardworking group monitored 220 DTPC parcels in 23 groupings (over 4,600 acres), reporting general condition of habitat, native wildlife and plant observations, and issues of management concern, such as unauthorized OHV use, invasive plants, fence damage, dumping, or evidence of grazing. The crew then installed vertical mulching at 38 sites, mostly to camouflage and discourage use of closed trails extending into fenced areas, removed dried invasive mustard plants from approximately 13 acres of land (approximately 60 large contractor bags worth!), and installed 28 new "Restoration in Progress" signs along fence line in the Eastern Expansion Area. DTPC staff and the ACE Crew carefully inspected the 21 miles of fencing protecting the Expansion Areas throughout the early spring and identified several fence breaks, splicing simple cuts where possible. In late March, the DTPC contracted crews from Friends of Jawbone to repair 14 damaged sites.



In addition to all the fieldwork, the DTPC retained Steve Ishii of VMSI, Inc. He was working behind the scenes to design an electronic reporting and mapping system to facilitate land monitoring and management. The system consists of monitoring forms within the ESRI Survey 123 app, and several map layers in the Collector app for reporting and viewing issues, wildlife sightings, safety hazards, and any other observations of note. The ACE Crew field tested the new system, and the results were amazing! Each day, the crew used the apps to navigate to sites, submit observations, and upload their data. From there, monitoring reports for each parcel or grouping were automatically created and emailed to DTPC staff and an online map was populated with hundreds of observations from the day. The system is a game changer for DTPC staff and volunteers, who can easily submit and review geo-referenced observations with photos that inform land management decisions. As part of the grant project, the system will be expanded for broader use in citizen science. The DTPC and its partners will continue monitoring conservation lands and fencing in the Expansion Area and working to protect and restore areas most affected by OHV use. The DTPC appreciates its many volunteers

and anticipates over 130 hours of volunteer time as partial match for the grant funding. If you are interested in land or fence monitoring, sign installation, weed removal, or other restoration activities, please go to our website and fill out our volunteer form [Volunteer Opportunities](#).

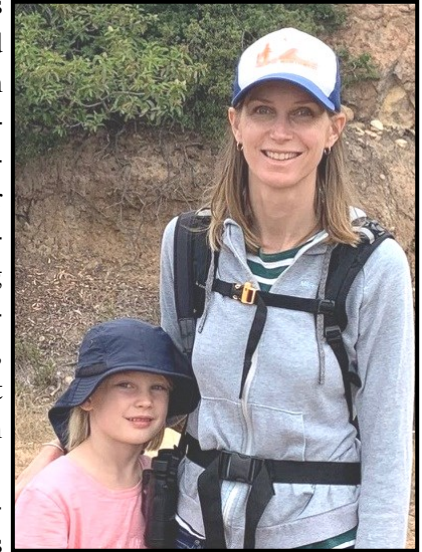
Thank you to California State Parks Off-Highway Motor Vehicle Recreation (OHMVR) Division, the American Conservation Experience (especially the incredible crew), Steve Ishii, Friends of Jawbone, Bureau of Land Management, Rachel Woodard, and Laura Stockton! Author - Mary Logan



ACE Crew Photographed: (From left to right) Sam Newman and Ana Solberg in front; Bryan Collins, Sarah Blöbaum, Maung Lay, Rebecca Rashkoff, and Dustin Cheney in back.

## Mary Logan, G-19 Grant Manager

The DTPC G-19 grant is managed by Mary Logan who originally joined the Desert Tortoise Preserve Committee (DTPC) in 2011 as Preserve Manager and Conservation Coordinator. Mary's love for animals and interest in conservation has taken her across the country and beyond to study condors and fish in California, red knots on Virginia's Eastern Shore, and lemurs in Madagascar. After completing her Master's in Wildlife Science from Virginia Tech, she was eager to be involved in on-the-ground conservation, which brought her to the Desert Tortoise Preserve Committee. During her time as Preserve Manager, Mary enjoyed getting to know the Mojave desert tortoise, Mohave ground squirrel, and other desert wildlife, but also loved working with the many volunteers, researchers, and agency partners committed to preserving those species in their native habitats. Since leaving the DTPC in 2014, Mary has done some work as an environmental planner and technical editor but has devoted most of her time to raising two little girls. Mary currently lives in Ventura County with her husband, David, and daughters, Violet (6) and Ada (3). In 2020, DTPC approached Mary to return with her expertise in grant administration as acting Preserve Manager to manage the G-19 grant. DTPC thanks Mary for her wonderful professional help.



## Public Lands Round Table of Ridgecrest

On May 15<sup>th</sup>, the Public Lands Roundtable out of Ridgecrest held their monthly meeting under the interpretive kiosk at the Desert Tortoise Natural Area (DTRNA). The Public Lands Round Table is a diverse alliance of individuals and groups concerned with issues regarding public lands in the east Mojave. A few groups involved in with the Roundtable



are Friends of Jawbone, the Maturango Museum, and the Transition Habitat Conservancy. Employees from the Bureau of Land Management and the National Parks Service were also present to discuss local issues and plans regarding public lands that they manage. In total, over 15 members were in attendance! Our Preserve Manager, Austin Hulbert, presented a small talk on the Desert Tortoise Preserve Com-



Karen Sanders  
Friends of Jawbone

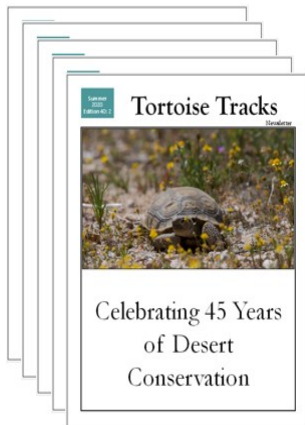
mittee (DTPC) and DTRNA, which was followed by agenda items for the Roundtable. A few items on the agenda included recent wildfires, BLM staffing changes, and scenic river designations. After those discussions, Austin and the Naturalist Scott showed members a few tortoise burrows. The next Public Lands Roundtable meeting will be held at Jawbone Station on June 19. If you would like more information on the Public Lands Roundtable, email Karen Sanders at [kjdebert@gmail.com](mailto:kjdebert@gmail.com) or join the Facebook group titled "Public Lands Round Table - Ridgecrest".



## Spring at the DTRNA!



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**GO GREEN**

### Special Update:

The *Tortoise Tracks* Newsletters are now available online! To view current, and past year publications, go to our website [www.tortoise-tracks.org](http://www.tortoise-tracks.org) select the "What's New" tab and navigate to [Tortoise Tracks Newsletter](#).





# Tortoise Tracks

THE DESERT TORTOISE PRESERVE COMMITTEE  
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## **DTPC MEMBERSHIP/CONTRIBUTION FORM**

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| <input type="checkbox"/> \$25 Individual | <input type="checkbox"/> \$75 Sponsor     | <input type="checkbox"/> \$200 Patron/Corporate |
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3. I'd like to help you grow the DTPC Permanent Endowment. Please accept an additional donation of:

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Let's grow the Permanent Endowment!

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Thank you.

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