

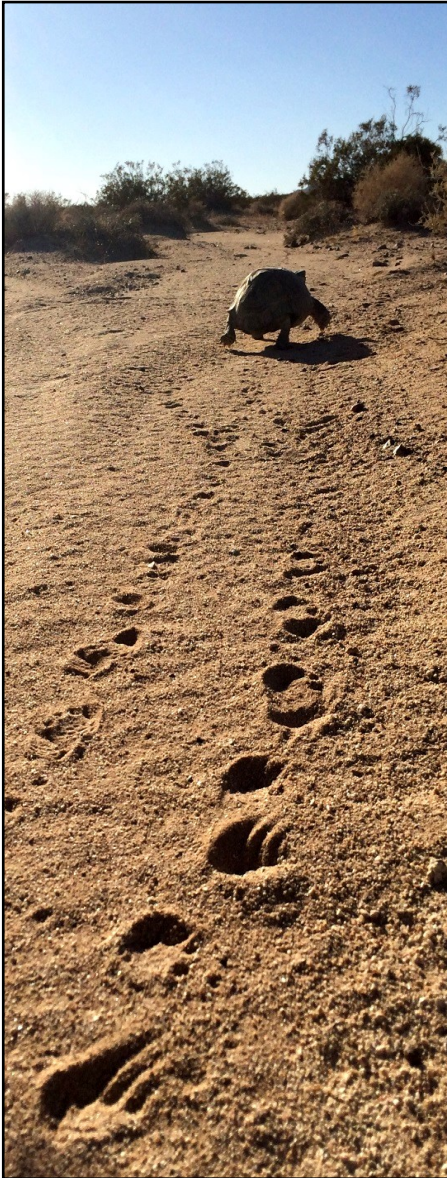


Spring 2022
Edition 42:1

Tortoise Tracks

Newsletter

DTPC 2022 Annual Meeting a Success!



The January 29th meeting held via Zoom opened with our President, Ron Berger, introducing our board members, staff, and honored guests that included Tom Bickauskas, Associate Field Manager of the Bureau of Land Management Ridgecrest Field Office, which is our most important partner that works closely with the DTPC to manage the DTRNA, Mary Logan, Restoration Project Manager, Steve Ishii, Map Guru and Friend of the Desert Tortoise, Kerry Holcomb, Fish and Wildlife biologist at the United States Fish and Wildlife Service, and Dr. Courtney Conway, Leader, USGS Idaho Cooperative Fish, and Wildlife Research Unit, and professor, Dept. of Fish and Wildlife Sciences (University of Idaho). Board business included the nomination and re-election of Rachel Woodard as Secretary, and Ron Berger as President for another 3-year term. In addition, the Board has nominated and elected Roger Dale for a three-year term. Roger served on the DTPC board from 1989 to 2001, and we're glad to have him back. Ron outlined the past and future vision for the DTPC, followed by Jun Lee's Land Acquisition report, Ellie Baker's outline for upcoming projects (see Work Party, Kiosk Panels, ACE Crew, and Ravens Oiling), Steve Ishii provided a demonstration of our Field Maps app technology that is a critical part of our data collection by staff, volunteers, and citizen scientists.



Tom Bickauskas - BLM

Kerry Holcomb, Senior Fish and Wildlife Biologist with USFWS delivered a comprehensive presentation labeled "Common Raven & Road Mortality Management: A Road Map to Recovery. It presented compelling findings through his research of Ravens and desert tortoises that you can watch by following this link to a full recording of the entire [DTPC Annual Meeting Video](#). Dr. Courtney J. Conway, Leader, USGS Idaho Cooperative Fish &



Steve Ishii - Map Guru

Wildlife Research Unit, Professor, Department of Fish & Wildlife Sciences presentation on burrowing owls provided insight into one of the other species that are residents of the DTRNA with some amazing pictures that you will not want to miss. Our meeting concluded with Tom Bickaaskas, Associate Field Manager of the Bureau of Land Management Ridgecrest Field Office going over our Naturalist season and our DTRNA weed management and mapping efforts this spring. Other topics included tortoise fencing, action on dog waste education, raven egg oiling, interpretive panel installation, and habitat restoration. Ron closed out the meeting with gratitude to our partners in conservation, special guest speakers, and our members for supporting our efforts through generous donations and volunteerism.

2022 Naturalist Season

March 19, 2022 marks the first day of our Naturalist Season at the Desert Tortoise Research Natural Area! We are excited to share there have been many changes including a new full-time naturalist Ian Notte driving all the way from Philadelphia, Pennsylvania to join the



Naturalist - Lisa LaVelle

scenic and unique preserve. Visitors to the DTRNA will also be welcomed by Lisa LaVelle who is celebrating her 10-year anniversary as our part-time Naturalist! Lisa enjoys sharing her passion for the desert tortoises with our guests and the quiet evenings living on-site that afford excep-

tional views of the sunsets and night

skies filled with stars. In partnership with the BLM, we have two additions to our Naturalist Season RV fleet, a second RV for our part-time Naturalists residence and an Interpretive trailer that will have a new look and interior design guests who visit every season will enjoy exploring. The Desert Tortoise Research Natural Area is open year-round to the public from 9-5 pm Monday -Sunday where naturalists, families, OHV riders, and tortoise enthusiasts can hike trails exploring the flowers and animals of our beautiful desert.



Naturalist - Ian Notte



The New Naturalist Trailer

In Memory of Don Williams

The brightness of CTTC's world is a little dimmer as we share the loss of Don Williams. Don's legacy is too meaningful to capture in simple words. We offer the following, acknowledging that it is a meager attempt. Don, a devoted family man, is survived by his loving wife, Sherry, whom he married in July of 1982, his son Lawrence, his granddaughter Lauren, grandson Lawrence, six bonus stepchildren, and nine bonus grandchildren all of whom he adored and will miss him dearly. "Don to many of us was a friend who guided us to new ways of seeing what Desert Tortoises and other species needed outside the box. I considered him the "God" or "Guru" of Desert Tortoises living throughout California and shared regions. His knowledge has touched so many. Don was a great friend and mentor and shared with me ways of dealing with politics in clubs and more. He was a leader and mentor for many groups in California organizations. We always shared the science of rearing Desert Tortoises in various climates. Don, you will be missed, my friend. Thank you for your military service representing the USA and thank you for your friendship I was fortunate to have for the past 15+ years." Rest in peace, my friend. – Kevin Norred, The Tortoise Home - We at the DTPC will greatly miss Don Williams and offer our condolences to his family.



Picture by MA Cohen



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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Board Member	Dr. Kristin Berry
Board Member &	Laura Stockton
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Tortoise Tracks is published
four times a year.

2022 ACE Crew Hitch - G-19 Grant



2022 ACE Crew

conduct field monitoring efforts and subsequently perform restoration activ-

This year, we are continuing to work with ACE crews (American Conservation Experience) to conduct habitat restoration efforts at the DTRNA provided by the G19 OHMV grant (CA State Parks Department). Pictured here is our 2022 crew, coming to us from local Ridgecrest! ACE crews typically conduct three 8-day "hitches," where crew members

ities on conservation lands immediately adjacent to the DTRNA. Our crews have been equipped with the latest GIS-based data collection systems on tablets to allow for live, in-the-field data collection and monitoring. The data gathered by the ACE crew during the initial monitoring phase will then inform our Preserve Manager, Ellie Baker, of which specific areas of these conservation lands require the most restoration work this year. Restoration activities performed by our valuable ACE crews include repairing minor fence damages from illegal OHV incursions, conservation sign installation, vertical mulching and invasive weed removal. Our partnership with ACE over the past two years has successfully provided additional habitat safety to all flora and fauna that call the DTRNA home, and educated the OHV community (through vertical mulching and sign install) that this preserved habitat requires all lovers of the desert to work together towards its protection and ultimate conservation.

New Interpretive Panels are Ready for Visitor Viewing



Rob Enriquez installing panels - Photos by Laura Stockton

In 2017 DTPC applied for a CA State Parks grant for outdoor recreation to replace the existing DTRNA Interpretive Kiosk panels. The original panels had weathered the harsh desert climate very well since being installed in 1980. However, they really needed to be updated. The \$29,000 grant was awarded in 2018. To meet the grant requirement of lasting 30 years, the aluminum Novalloy material that was originally used was selected. The many challenges of creating and installing the new interpretive panels would take 5 years. The fabricator currently has a maximum panel size of 18 x 36 inches vs the original size of 36 x 36 inches. Since the original backing would be used and to better present, the graphics, 2 of the smaller sized panels

were designed to fit together. Graphic artist, Chris Barela, created outstanding graphics. Dr. Kristin Berry's expertise was invaluable as was Rachel Woodard's. The completed graphics and text designs were submitted to the sign company, Interpretive Graphics, in early 2020 with the hope of having the completed panels for a spring celebration of the 45th DTPC Anniversary. Unfortunately, a critical chemical that was needed in the production was on extended backorder. Interpretive Graphics provided a solution of producing a temporary version that could be used for the anniversary and during the 2020 Naturalist Season. These carefully orchestrated plans were interrupted by COVID, which caused the closure of the DTRNA Interpretive Center during Spring 2020. The goal then became installing the permanent panels for the 2021 Naturalist Season. The back-ordered chemical was still not available, so reformulation was necessary. Finally, all the pieces fell into place for the panels to be installed in time for the 2022 Naturalist Season! Rob Enriquez of the BLM expertly met the considerable challenges of removing the old panels and fit-





ting the new ones into place. Thanks to all who had a role in the creation of the new panel including, most especially, our Project Coordinator Laura Stockton. Now maybe the best time ever to visit the preserve. Stop by now through May, enjoy our new kiosk panels, meet our Naturalist, enjoy the fresh air and beauty, and maybe, just maybe, you'll get to see a tortoise.

Ravens Nest Oiling by Tim Shields



Photo by Rachel Woodard

“ I began work at the DTRNA, then called the DTNA, in 1979, helping to perform the inaugural coverage of the 3 square miles interpretive center plot as part of Dr. Berry's long-term tortoise population trend monitoring project. From then until 2012, I participated in or led all the coverages of the DTRNA-IC plot and did the interior plot in 2011. Over the course of that span, I helped document the steep decline in tortoise numbers inside the preserve and their near-disappearance outside. One of the key conclusions of the work was the role that raven predation was playing in driving tortoise numbers down and in creating an unsus-

tainable demographic shift. The last straw came in 2011 when the only live juvenile tortoise that volunteer, Freya Reder and I saw was in the beak of a raven. That was a turning point for me, causing me to turn my attention to raven control methods. Applying a thin coat of vegetable or other non-toxic oil to the shell of a bird egg prevents its hatching by interrupting gas exchange across the shell. However, the now addled oiled egg is undamaged visually and adult birds tend to continue to care for the eggs, thus precluding re-nesting by them and tying up their efforts. Ideally, this effort continues past the point of re-nesting. Egg oiling has been done for over 70 years to control ground-nesting bird reproduction. The innovation pioneered by Sundance Biology and Hard-shell Labs is called Remote Egg Oiling (REO). By pairing a pressurized oil delivery system with a camera, we can investigate oil nests far off the ground. We attach these devices to telescoping poles and aerial drones to treat nests up to 120' off the ground. Ravens do not abandon oiled



Photo by Ellie Baker

nests and do extend “the care of the eggs from one to several weeks in most cases. The benefits of REO are two-fold. Within the breeding season, we prevent the hatching of eggs and thus preclude raven predation on juvenile tortoises (and other desert wildlife) that would normally be associated with the rearing of the potential nestlings. We have seen some evidence of abandonment of nests that are oiled consistently over several years. Given the fact that there are a limited number of suitable nests sites for ravens, we may be able to rid sizable areas of nesting ravens. Thus, we may see a long-term reduction in raven predation over areas of high-quality desert tortoise habitat. This will be the third year of REO work at the DTRNA. In that time, we are confident that we have eliminated raven fledglings from nests on the preserve itself. Volunteer nest-finding and monitoring have been the key to this success, greatly magnifying the attention paid to this geographical area. This is a great example of cooperation between our egg oiling specialists and the volunteer “eyes on the ground (and skies).”

March 25th & 26th - Spring Work Party



Photo by Rachel Woodard

We are happy to announce our March 25th work party is at full capacity with 30 volunteers! In partnership with Desert Survivors, a non-profit organization of people who love the desert and are committed to preserving its unique beauty and value, the DTPC accepted an opportunity to work with Barb Bane and welcome 15 members of their organization as Spring Work Party volunteers. Transition Habitat Conservancy’s Executive Director, Sam Easley and Natural Resources Biologist, Sarah Berryman join veteran DTPC volunteers Bonny Ahern and Craig Bansmer as our knowledgeable Team Leads who will guide 4 teams of volunteers into the DTRNA to refresh signs and trails. Sophia Osho, Executive Administrator, and Ellie Baker, Preserve Manager look forward to working directly with each Team Leader and volunteer to enhance the experience of our Naturalist season visitors and celebrate a return to hosting vol-

unteer events since the 2020 COVID

shutdown. Special precautions are being taken to ensure all our volunteers have the ability to socially distance while working with access to masks, gloves, and hand sanitizer. As previously stated in newsletters, volunteers are the lifeblood of our organization and we are recruiting passionate community and conservation individuals year-round join us in the field, the office, and remotely. The best way to become a volunteer is to follow this link <https://tortoise-tracks.org/volunteer-opportunities/> to our website where our volunteer opportunities are posted, and you can fill out our volunteer form.



DTRNA Kiosk - Photo by Sophia Osho

Spring Has Sprung! Life in the Desert



A Mojave Green Rattlesnake
at the DTRNA
Photo by Sophia Osho



A beautiful blooming
Mojave Fish Hook Cactus
Photo by Rachel Woodard



A male tortoise enjoying
the DTRNA
Photo by Ellie Baker



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

GO GREEN

Calendar of Events:

- **March - May - Raven Nest Monitoring - Still Accepting Volunteers**
- **March 19th - June 1st - Desert Tortoise Research Natural Area Naturalist season when you are most likely to walk our trails and see a desert tortoise in it's natural habitat.**
- **March 25th - Spring Work Party - Now Accepting Volunteers for the Fall Work Party in late October**



Tortoise Tracks

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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:

- | | | |
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| <input type="checkbox"/> \$250 | <input type="checkbox"/> \$1,000 | <input type="checkbox"/> \$5,000 |
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☐ 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!

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Thank you.

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