



Summer
2022
Edition 42:2

Tortoise Tracks

Newsletter

DTPC Earns Land Trust Recognition



A Mark of Distinction

The accreditation seal **AFFIRMS** national quality standards are met.



- ✓ SOUND FINANCES
- ✓ ETHICAL CONDUCT
- ✓ RESPONSIBLE GOVERNANCE
- ✓ LASTING STEWARDSHIP

On January 28, 2022, we received accreditation from the Land Trust Accreditation Commission (LTAC). After undergoing a rigorous review process over the past 3 years, we are now part of a network of over 450 accredited land trusts across the nation that have demonstrated their commitment to professional excellence and maintaining the public's trust in their work in managing over 20 million acres. "The entire Board and staff pulled together extensive data and documentation of our corporate governance, fiscal oversight, land acquisition and management policies and practices to achieve this significant milestone," said Jun Lee, the DTPC's Interim Executive Director and Director of Land Acquisition. "Kudos to Kathy Simon, our past Interim Executive Director, the entire Board, and the support of our current management team, Ellie Baker and Sophia Osho, as well as their predecessors and volunteers" he added.

Accreditation by the LTAC demonstrates DTPC's commitment to sound non-profit land conservation practices, and we believe we are a more vital organization for having gone through the rigorous accreditation program.

What benefits of being accredited led the DTPC leadership to persevere through the multi-year process of proving qualification? One significant benefit

is automatic eligibility to hold easements with California's Sustainable Agricultural Land Conservation Program, which the Greenhouse Gas Reduction Fund supports. We will also receive an external five-star rating from GuideStar that assures potential donors and grant administrators that the DTPC is capable of professionally managing public and private funding and land entrusted to the organization. According to the LTAC benefits report of 2019, 79% of foundation and government stakeholders indicated that accreditation factored into their organization's decision making; 83% of landowners reported accreditation increased their confidence that their land would be protected in perpetuity; 80% of landowners said they considered accreditation when deciding to work with a land trust; and 87% of accredited land trusts reported accreditation motivated them to make organizational im-

provements. Accredited land trusts reported from 2005-to 2015 a 106% average increase in their number of volunteers, a 107% average increase in operating budgets, and a 100% average increase in acres conserved.

A huge debt of gratitude is owed to Robert Wood, former Vice President of the Board (2013-2020), who started this process in 2019, our past and present Board Members, Ron Berger, Laura Stockton, Dr. Kristin Berry, Roger Dale, Rachel Woodard, Kathy Simon, Dave Zantiny, Greg Lathrop, and Larry Nelson. We especially appreciate the tremendous work of former Preserve Manager and Conservation Coordinators Mary Logan, Jillian Estrada & Brittany Slabach, our staff members Sophia Osho, Executive Administrator, and Jun Lee, Director of Land Acquisition, and our volunteers Steve Ishii, Bonny Ahern, Craig Bansmer, Maribel Lopez, Marina Lavender, and Bethany Woodard.



DTRNA Tortoise Spring 2022

Threatened, Endangered, and Extinct. What is the Difference?

We are grateful for the positive response to our urgent appeal to our members to support our petition to uplist the desert tortoise from “threatened” to “endangered” under the California Endangered Species Act.

This effort started in March 2020 when we joined the Desert Tortoise Council and Defenders of Wildlife to petition the California Fish and Wildlife Commission (the “Commission”) to uplist the desert tortoise to a listing category that reflects the urgent need to recover the species. As we cited in our petition, and as the Commission agreed in its October 2020 decision to advance the petition: The desert tortoise populations declined substantially from 1977 to 2000 and then substantially declined further from 2001 to 2014, according to two long-term monitoring projects. Population density estimates in most of sampling areas are well below minimum viability density of 3.9 adult tortoise per square kilometer.

Never in our almost 48 years of conservation have we faced such a critical milestone. Put simply, we need to draw a line in the sand to prevent the “endangered” desert tortoise from the awful prospect of extinction. Dr. Kristin Berry, one of the founders of the DTPC, recently published a groundbreaking study with the same dire conclusion: The Mojave desert tortoise is now in the top 50 species of the world’s most endangered tortoises and freshwater turtles. The International Union for Conservation of Nature’s (IUCN) Species Survival Commission, Tortoise and Freshwater Turtle Specialist Group, now considers Mojave desert tortoise to be Critically Endangered (Berry et al. 2021), a “species that possess an extremely high risk of extinction as a result of rapid population declines of 80 to more than 90 percent over the previous 10 years (or three generations), a current population size of fewer than 50 individuals, or other factors.” It is one of three turtle and tortoise species in the United States to be critically endangered.

What is the Difference Among Threatened, Endangered, and Extinct? The answer is clear: You, our supporters, and our mutual commitment to turn the tide against the extinction of a species that has adapted and survived over thousands of years. As you know we don’t take fundraising lightly. In our long history we have strived to balance

our concern without tipping over to alarm. We don't stuff our member's mailboxes with fundraising appeals. But the time has come to make a stand, so we continue to ask for your support. Please consider joining our Sustaining Stewards by contributing regularly through a recurring debit or credit card donation through our website www.tortoise-tracks.org or for recipients of the electronic publication of our newsletter use this link to [Donate or Become a Sustainer](#)

Naturalist Season Report

Our annual spring naturalist program kicked off on March 19th and concluded in mid-May with a diverse range of public visitation. Our naturalists, Ian Notte and Lisa Lavelle welcomed a total of 187 visitor groups with guided tours of the walking trails at the Desert Tortoise Research Natural Area (DTRNA). Highlights of this season include:

- Visitors from states as far away as Oregon, Indiana, Georgia and other east coast origins and international visitors with one group from Switzerland;
- Interface with 16 visitor groups who arrived on off-highway vehicles;
- Over 30 tortoise sightings were reported by both our visitors and naturalists at the DTRNA, in spite of another dry year. Indeed, only two days out of the 10-week season were reported to exhibit some amount of rain.

Of this year's tortoise sightings, most of the individuals observed appeared to be adult males, with the exception of an adult female observed during our Spring Work Party and one deceased juvenile (cause of death unknown). Creosote bushes, Cheesebushes and Paper Bag bushes alike were blooming and brimming with numerous species of pollinators. Other animal species were active and observed including birds such as Loggerhead shrikes, Cactus Wrens and Horned Larks along with numerous reptiles like the Western Whiptail lizard, the Mojave Green rattlesnake and the Long-Nosed Leopard lizard. Special thanks to Ian Notte and Lisa Lavelle, for dedicating their time to serve as our naturalists. We were able to install multiple trailers this year with the assistance of BLM staff Rob Enriquez and Tom Bickaaskas and Karen Sanders of the Friends of Jawbone.

Alexia Svejda of the California City Chamber of Commerce facilitated much needed water access and other resources for our naturalists. The Spring Naturalist Program was funded by a generous grant from the U.S. Department of the Interior, Bureau of Land Management.



Rob Enriquez - BLM Equipment Operator

2022 Ravens Report

As we reported in our last issue, we continue to work with Tim Shields of Hardshell Labs, Inc. to monitor raven nesting activity within the DTRNA. Starting this spring, we have expanded our monitoring efforts to include land immediately surrounding the preserve as well as much of the City California City, which lies south of the DTRNA. We need to “expand the address book” of known nest locations, according to Tim Shields, to significantly stunt raven population increases in the area. The expanded monitoring area also helps to prioritize raven mitigation efforts by focusing on locations of higher nest occurrences and activity.



Ravens Nest Monitoring

Our Preserve Manager and Conservation Coordinator, Ellie Baker, with guidance provided by Board member Rachel Woodard and data support provided by Steve Ishii, coordinated DTPC volunteers in support of the effort. We kicked off the spring monitoring project with a comparison of last year's data and this year's observed adult bird activity. Steve Ishii and Ellie Baker provided a virtual training seminar for volunteers on how to use our GIS-enabled programs in the field to record raven nest locations and other data in early March. Throughout the remainder of March and all of April, our eager volunteers deployed out into the field to visually survey for nests and bird activity both on foot and via vehicles. Volunteers using our GIS-enabled programs in the field were able to submit their raven data electronically via their cell phones and a decent cellular connection, thus allowing Ellie Baker to review all incoming data to manage monitoring efforts in real time at our Ridgecrest office. This is what we found:



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	Greg Lathrop
Board Member	Dr. Kristin Berry
Board Member	Laura Stockton
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Ellie Baker

Naturalist

Ian Notte

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Tortoise Tracks is published
four times a year.

- 101 total nest and/or perch locations were visually checked by volunteers in the field this year, which is a 100% increase in nest/perch locations from last year (51 nest/perch locations total reported in 2021);
- Of these 101 nest/perch locations, 24 were reported to be “active,” which is defined as the observation of new nesting material having been deposited into the nest structure, adult birds using/perching on the nest, and/or the presence of eggs;
- 12 of the 24 reported active nests, were confirmed to contain eggs and were subsequently oiled.
- Interestingly enough, of the 12 nests this year reported to contain eggs, only 2 of these nests were located either on or directly adjacent to the DTRNA.
- The remainder of the active nests were located in electrical and telephone poles along major routes including Neuralia road, Highway 14 and 20-Mule Team road, and in trees and poles throughout California City.

According to Tim Shields, perhaps adult ravens are choosing to nest closer to food and shelter resources, including larger power stations and populous areas like California City and Ridgecrest. With this year’s success, the DTPC



Egg Oiling

aims to continue this growth of our raven monitoring program and continue to cover more ground with each subsequent year (and with help from Tim!) We would like to thank the following generous volunteers individually for dedicating their personal time, mileage and equipment towards this year’s raven monitoring efforts at the DTRNA: Bonny Ahern, Craig Bansmer, Dan Burnett, Alexia Svejda, Mahmood (Noon) Mokhayesh, Vincent LeVeque, Tawni Gotbaum, Bob McGowan, Tina McGowan, Rachel Woodard and Steve Ishii.

Spring Work - Trail Maintenance

After a two year hiatus due to Covid-19, we were pleased to resume our semi-annual work party this spring on April 23rd. With the support of the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) Ridgecrest Field Office, long-time volunteers Bonny Ahern and Craig Bansmer, Desert Survivors, and Transition Habitat Conservancy, 23 volunteers arrived at 7:00 a.m. to help set up the shade and lunch structures before breaking into four teams to improve the Main Loop, Animal Trail, DTRNA entry, and Plant Loop Trail. The DTRNA entry volunteers worked diligently to place large border stones donated and delivered by Karen and Roy Sanders to define our entry trails. Additionally, trail team volunteers replaced signage, and our new kiosk panels were cleaned for our Naturalist season spring opening.



Volunteer Cleaning New Kiosk Panels

Board members Kathy Simons and Rachel Woodard toured the trails, meeting volunteers and sharing in the fun of our event. Tom Bickauskas, Associate Field Manager for the BLM, joined in the trail improvements, welcomed our Naturalist, Ian Notte, and toured our new Interpretive trailer provided by his office. The many volunteer hands made for light work of our to-do list that was completed in 4 hours! In addition to field work, we gathered under the shade structures by 11:00 a.m. for a water break and a talk by Kathy Simons on Mohave Ground Squirrels and the desert tortoise, followed by our partner Sam Easley, the Executive Director of the Transition Habitat Conservancy who shared his group's efforts to conserve and protect land for the desert tortoise in a diverse array of California habitats. This season, we treated volunteers from San Francisco with a tour of the DTRNA led by our Preserve Manager and Conservation Coordinator, Ellie Baker, and BLM Natural Resources Biologist Sarah Berryman. The DTRNA trails were surrounded by wildflowers that undoubtedly led to the encounter with a desert tortoise, surprising and delighting all attendees

who had a great deal to talk about during our end-of-day boxed lunch “thank you” provided by the DTPC Board.

We are now planning a Fall Work Party to monitor our conservation lands in San Bernardino, Riverside and Kern Counties for Saturday, October 22nd - Sunday, October 23rd. If you would like to join our efforts please follow this link to sign up for volunteer opportunities. <https://tortoise-tracks.org/volunteer-opportunities/> or call our Executive Administrator, Sophia Osho for additional information and ways to volunteer beyond land monitoring and semi-annual work parties.



Board Member Rachel Woodard & Volunteers Spreading Gravel



DTPC Donors and Their Plaques Shine Forever

By Ron Berger, President of the DTPC



Since our beginning 48 years ago at the home of one of our founders in Ridgecrest, the DTPC has received continuing support from a small group of committed conservationists – often over the course of a lifetime for many of our supporters. Our Founders Fund was created decades ago in honor of the long-term commitment of our members who have donated \$10,000 or more in the course of their membership. As we are getting closer to our 50th anniversary, we took a step back to revisit the tremendous support we have received over the years and reached out to those members whose membership fees, donations, and other contributions were moving closer to the Founders Fund level. So, last fall, the Board asked if I would contact all of the individuals who, over the course of their lifetimes, had donated \$5,000 or more to DTPC and our work in tortoise recovery. I thought it would be a wonderful opportunity to ‘meet’ a bunch of truly generous, wonderful, philanthropic folks, and that is precisely what it was.

Over the course of the next several months, I contacted several dozen folks. Doing so required a bit of legwork. In some cases, we only had a physical mailing address. In others, only an email. In yet others, only a phone number. Some, naturally, had passed away. In a number of cases, one member of a couple had passed away. But of those that remained, all were so kind and happy to be contacted and wanted to talk about tortoises and what DTPC was doing to help. I asked each of these generous donors if they knew how much they had donated to DTPC over the 48+ years of our existence. I shared with them what our records showed. Again, the job was intriguing. In some cases, our records showed one spouse separately from the other. In other cases, their donations were spread across their businesses as well as personal. When we were done tallying up their donations, I informed them that we, the DTPC, wanted to create a ‘wall of fame’ type of recognition, a place at the DTRNA where those donors who, over the course of their lives, had donated \$10,000 or more to DTPC, would be recognized in perpetuity. I was delighted that these already super-generous donors were excited to donate even more so that their lifetime total would equal or exceed the \$10,000 threshold. Some went a great deal further, with one couple sending \$50,000 over the next few weeks.

So, it is my honor announce the 2022 inductees to the Founders Fund. We recently installed plaques at the DTRNA Kiosk for the following supporters: Stieg and Nancy Klein, Doris Peak, Helen Hammer, M.D. In Memory of Tort and Pete - Greg Lathrop, Fred and Joy Lane, Carol and Ron Berger, Cynthia E. Gaya, Christine and Bob Young, Denise LaBerteaux and Bruce Garlinger, Toots Starkey, Libby Vincent, Roger and Cathy Dale, Mike and Rhubarb Brown, Vincent E. LaVeque, Webster the Tortoise, Nancy V. Thomas, and Lucy G. Clark. We are grateful to Dr. Kristin Berry’s coordination of the fabrication of the beautiful plaques and to Ray Butler and Laura Stockton who personally installed the plaques in cement at the base of the DTRNA Kiosk. Our 2022 Founders Fund inductees join earlier donor recognitions: In Memory of Marcel, Renee, and Eric Sommeria from their Family, Gerhard Paul Schumacher, Beverly F. Stevenon, Herbert Berk, Rose H. Berk Trust, Yorkshire Family Trust, Ruth L. Harvey Revocable Trust, Lawrence A. Harvey Revocable Trust, Weingart Foundation, Mary J. Trotter, Walter Allen / Casa de Tortuga, California Turtle and Tortoise Club Westchester Chapter, Kristin Highberg Berry, Charlotte and Albert Gould, Mary Cornett and Mimi Loutrel, Mary Ann and Ronal A. Henry, Richard Curt Miller and Leslie Scott Miller, and Joanne W. Smith. Whether you are at the \$25 level or that \$50,000+ level, you are helping us to make a real positive difference for the tortoise. Thank you for your continued support. Your contributions over many years are truly sustaining.



Tortoise Tracks

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