

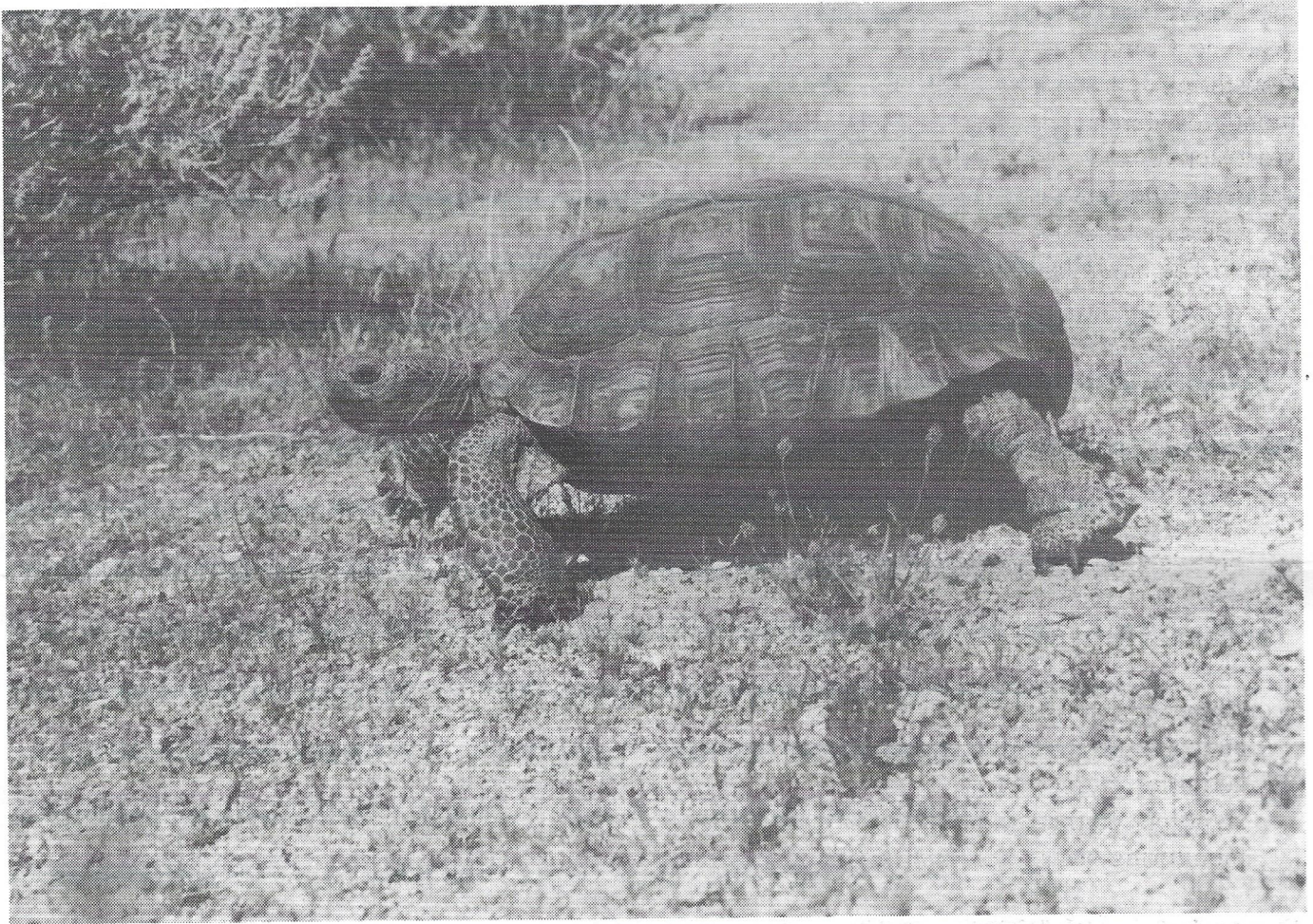


# Tortoise Tracks

The Desert Tortoise Preserve Committee, Inc.

Summer 1994

15:1



*Desert tortoise at Desert Tortoise Natural Area in Kern County, California. Photo by Bev Steveson.*

## Preserve Committee's 20th Anniversary Event Scheduled for November 5

This year marks the 20th anniversary of the Desert Tortoise Preserve Committee. In celebration of this milestone, the Committee will hold a special event at the Desert Tortoise Natural Area (DTNA) on Saturday, November 5, 1994. The event will start at 11 a.m. and last until approximately 3 p.m. The celebration will include a barbecue and installation of award plaques at the DTNA Interpretive Center. The plaques will honor several individuals who

have provided generous financial support to the Committee over the years.

All DTPC members and their guests are invited to attend the anniversary party. Participants will be asked to make a \$10 contribution, payable in advance, to offset the cost of the barbecue and other refreshments. Participants will also be asked to bring their own folding tables and chairs.

**Continued on Back Page**

## 1994 Activity Report from DTNA Naturalists

This spring, for the sixth consecutive year, the Preserve Committee funded a naturalist program at the Desert Tortoise Natural Area (DTNA). This year the Committee contracted with EnviroPlus Consulting to provide naturalist services during the months of March, April and May, when tortoises are most active and visitation to the DTNA is the greatest. Chuck Boland served as the lead naturalist, with assistance from Susan Moore and Cynthia Jones. The naturalists' duties included:

- 1) **Data collection:** recording information about visitors and visitation patterns;
- 2) **Interpretive services:** educating visitors and answering their questions about desert tortoises, other fauna and flora around the DTNA Interpretive Center, and the desert ecosystem; and discussing the DTNA and its role in conserving a part of the desert biome;
- 3) **Monitoring:** observing the conduct of visitors and taking appropriate action when prohibited activities were observed, recording wildlife sightings, maintaining exhibits along the trails, monitoring outhouses, and collecting litter;
- 4) **Assisting with DTPC activities:** taking part in DTPC programs such as guided tours and the sale of DTPC fundraising products;
- 5) **Reporting:** preparing a final report for the DTPC, summarizing the activities and observations of the naturalists during the spring season at the DTNA.

Excerpts from Chuck Boland's activity report are provided below.

### Interpretive Services

The knowledge and perceptions of visitors

ranged widely. Most visitors knew that the desert tortoise was a protected animal, but understanding what that meant varied between groups. For some, protection meant that no development was allowed in any place the desert tortoise lived. A small minority actually understood the provisions of the Endangered Species Act and knew the desert tortoise was listed as threatened. Visitors with pet tortoises at home or former owners of captive tortoises also often failed initially to perceive just how different captive tortoises were from wild ones, and only came to appreciate the differences after discussion of diet, hydration, and response to humans with the naturalist.

Twenty-one visitor groups had at least one individual who had a pet tortoise. Several of these people noted differences between a wild and a pet tortoise, the most marked difference being the timidity of the wild tortoises when people are near. Other visitors had never seen a wild tortoise. Several visitors, upon seeing a tortoise for the first time, were very surprised at how tame they seemed; each visitor seemed to have a unique preconceived idea for how a wild tortoise would react to human presence. Many visitors were amazed at the size and complexity of the tortoise burrows.

### Monitoring

A total of 143 visitor groups saw at least one desert tortoise during the three month period a naturalist was present. Sixty-nine, or 47.2% of visitor groups saw a tortoise in March, thirty-seven groups, or 17.1% in April, and thirty-seven groups, or 24.6% saw at least one in May. Overall, 27.9% of all visitor groups observed one. I usually attempted to locate a tortoise each morning and was

---

### The Desert Tortoise Preserve Committee

#### Officers

|                     |                |
|---------------------|----------------|
| Roger Dale          | President      |
| Tom Dodson          | Vice President |
| George Moncsko      | Vice President |
| Laura Stockton      | Vice President |
| Jayne Chavez-Scales | Secretary      |
| Carol Panlaqui      | Treasurer      |
| Bev Stevenson       | Board Member   |
| Dr. Kristin Berry   | Board Member   |

successful in doing so 38 of 92 days. On days I was unable to locate a tortoise those groups which stayed out longest were usually the most successful groups in spotting one. When I was told about the location of a tortoise I would inform other groups so they could view it also.

Littering was not a pronounced problem. Most people were careful with their trash and took it out with them when they left. Not having a trash receptacle may have prevented a large deluge of trash from accumulating at the DTNA. Cigarette butts, however, were a constant nuisance. I witnessed many smokers placing their butts in a pocket and never witnessed anyone throwing one on the ground, yet cigarette butts were the trash item most frequently found.

### ***Collection and harassment of wild tortoises***

There were no signs of anyone attempting to collect a desert tortoise, however, there were three incidences of harassment. On 16 March a couple coming to the DTNA found a wild tortoise on the Mojave-Randsburg road. Since they were less than one mile from the DTNA they decided to release it at the Interpretive Center where they believed it would be safe. Upon seeing the tortoise and discussing the circumstances with the visitors, I had them lead me to where they had found the tortoise so that I could release it. I placed it under a creosote bush. The tortoise did not void.

The second incidence occurred 3 May when a visitor attempted to release a wild tortoise into the DTNA. The visitor found the tortoise several miles away from the DTNA and decided to bring the tortoise to the Interpretive Center where it would be safe from off-road vehicles. I explained to him why it would be best to leave the tortoise in the area with which it would be familiar, and he agreed to return the tortoise to where he had found it.

The third incidence of harassment took place on 15 May. I observed a man throw an apple down an active burrow supposedly to coax the tortoise to come out. When I confronted him, he told me he was only trying to feed the tortoise, and he did not see how giving food to a tortoise could be construed as

inappropriate behavior. The visitor listened to my impassioned discourse and then immediately left the DTNA. I retrieved the apple.

### ***Attempted release of captive tortoises***

On 10 April a couple brought in a pair of four year old captive tortoises. The tortoises were registered and marked in accordance with the law. The couple have a breeding pair of tortoises and did not know that it was illegal to release captive tortoises into the wild. The couple mistakenly believed that healthy young tortoises should be able to increase the wild tortoise population. I explained the law to them, as well as the reasons captive tortoises should not be released into the wild. They took information about several groups who could assist them in adopting out their two tortoises.

### ***Venomous animals***

There were eight recorded sightings of Mojave rattlesnakes during the three month period; there were only three sidewinder sightings. I had to move two Mojave rattlesnakes which were posing a threat to visitors. The first occurrence was on 8 May when I found a Mojave rattlesnake resting in the shade of a creosote on the main trail. Because many children were also in the same area walking the trails, I used a snake tong to capture the snake and move it a safe distance away from the trail. On 29 May I discovered another Mojave rattlesnake in the eastern-most outhouse during my mourning check of the buildings and grounds. I moved it a safe distance from the two outhouses before anyone arrived.

### ***Assistance with Desert Tortoise Preserve Committee activities***

There were three scheduled DTPC tours. The first group consisted of 30 individuals from American River College in Sacramento, California, on 26 March. The second group was 6 individuals from the Sierra Club (Los Angeles chapter) on 10 April. The third tour, 10 individuals, was from the Santa Barbara Chapter of the California Tortoise and Turtle Club on 16 April. Only one of the scheduled tours saw a tortoise.

## Preserve Committee's 20th Anniversary Event Scheduled for November 5

(Continued from Front Page)

Please send RSVP's (including barbecue donations) by October 25, 1994 to:

DTPC  
P.O. Box 2910  
San Bernardino, CA 92406

Please indicate the number of people in your party, their names, and include your address and telephone number with your RSVP.

Please call Roger Dale at (818) 501-5219 if you have any questions or would like further information. We look forward to seeing you on November 5!

---

DESERT TORTOISE PRESERVE COMMITTEE, INC.  
P.O. BOX 2910, SAN BERNARDINO, CA 92406

NONPROFIT ORG.  
BULK MAIL  
PAID  
PERMIT NO. 190  
SAN PEDRO, CA  
90731

Address Correction Requested

Laura A. Stockton  
418 Brookhaven  
Bakersfield CA 93304-3477