
Tortoise Tracks

The Desert Tortoise Preserve Committee, Inc.

Fall 1995 15:4

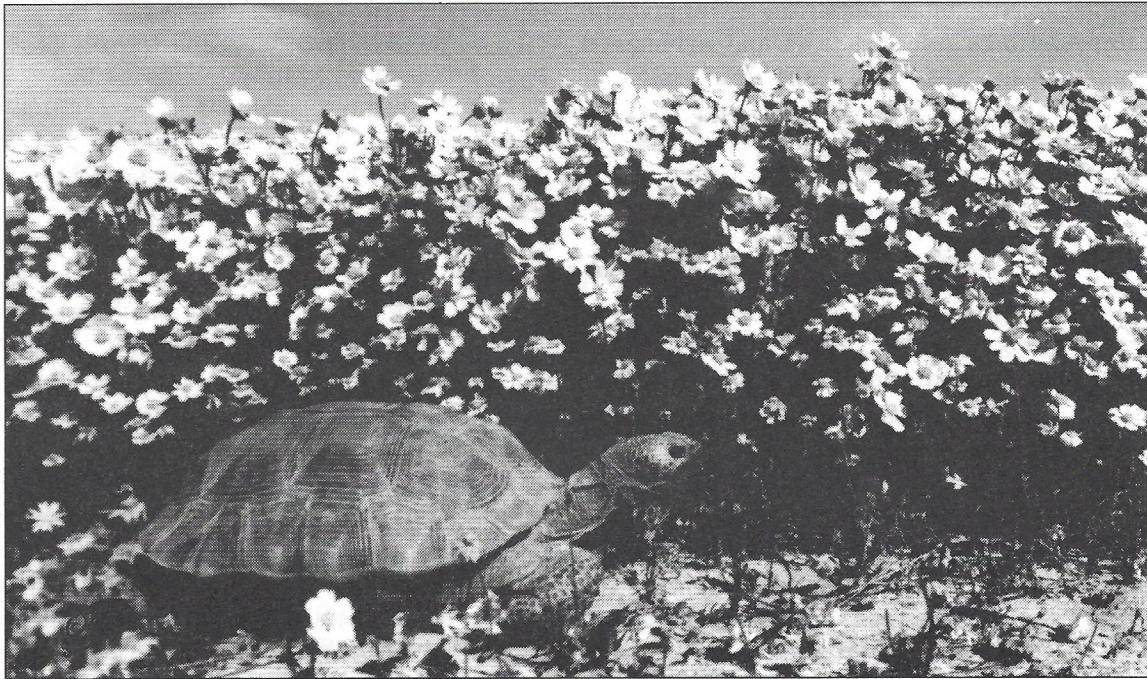


Photo by Bev Steveson

KAREN SPANGENBERG TO GIVE ANNUAL BANQUET PRESENTATION

Karen Spangenberg will give the evening address at the Preserve Committee's annual banquet on January 13, 1996. Her talk is titled "What Baby Tortoises Do with their Time" and is based on a two-year study of juvenile desert tortoises at Ft. Irwin.

Karen Spangenberg grew up in Palo Alto, California. It was there she went on many hikes and outdoor excursions with her family in the foothills where they lived. During this time, she learned to love wildflowers and, at one time or another, checked out every book on wildflowers in the public library. She attended college at Lawrence University in Appleton, Wisconsin, graduating with a B.A. in Biology in 1970. She worked for a short time at Stanford Research Institute in the microbiology division before moving to San Francisco where she became involved in photography and documentary filmmaking. Her independent film experience prepared her to become a dialog sound editor on feature films. She worked on the films "Amadeus", "Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade", "Dead Poet's Society",

"The Prince of Tides", "Unforgiven", and many others during 13 years in the motion picture industry.

Planning to return to school, she volunteered with the Desert Tortoise Research Group, Bureau of Land Management, in Spring 1993. She studied the foraging behavior of adult female and immature desert tortoises near Kramer Junction, San Bernardino County, California. She found that desert tortoises were selective feeders regardless of age, feeding according to plant availability and individual preference. One year later she returned to school as a graduate student at California State University, Dominguez Hills, Carson, California, studying with Dr. David Morafka.

For two years she has studied juvenile desert tortoises at Ft. Irwin Study Site (FISS), 40 miles northeast of Barstow in the Central Mojave Desert. A tortoise hatchery/nursery was built at FISS in 1990. To gain

continued on page 2

continued from page 1

access to hard to find hatchling and juvenile desert tortoises, tortoises are hatched and raised inside a predator-proof enclosure at FISS. For two spring/summer activity seasons, Karen Spangenberg has studied the activities, microhabitat and burrow use of juvenile desert tortoises both released from and maintained inside this enclosure. She will share her observations of and compare the behaviors, foraging patterns, and survivorship of juvenile tortoise on the study site.

ANNUAL MEETING AND BANQUET

The Desert Tortoise Preserve Committee, Inc. will host the annual meeting of the corporation and banquet on Saturday, January 13, 1996 at the Green Tree Inn in Victorville. The meeting of the corporation is open to all members and the general public. The price of the dinner is \$17.00 per person, including tax, tip, beverage and dessert.

The afternoon meeting will offer an opportunity to hear first-hand about the Committee's accomplishments during 1995 and its plans for 1996. The meeting will include a special report on the Committee's recent acquisition (in partnership with the Wildlands Conservancy) of 1,360 acres of critical desert tortoise habitat in the Pilot Knob allotment in the western Mojave Desert (see related article on back page).

If you cannot be present for the afternoon meeting, we hope you will be able to join us for the evening dinner and program which will feature a talk by Karen Spangenberg.

The schedule of events is as follows:

Business Meeting	2:00 - 5:00 p.m.
Social Hour	5:00 - 6:00 p.m.
Dinner Program	6:00 - 9:30 p.m.

Please note that your reservation must be received by January 5, 1996. A reservation form is provided on Page 7.

SUMMARY OF THE NATURALISTS' ACTIVITIES AT THE DESERT TORTOISE NATURAL AREA IN 1995

By Chuck Boland, DTNA Naturalist

The Desert Tortoise Natural Area (DTNA) is located north of California City in the western Mojave Desert of Kern County, California. Initial protection for the area came in 1973 when it was closed to off-highway vehicle (OHV) use. The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) established the DTNA in 1976 as a Wildlife Habitat Management Area and developed its first management plan for the area in 1977. This plan was updated in 1979. Most of the perimeter of the DTNA was fenced in 1977-78 and it was closed to grazing in 1978. In 1980, the area was withdrawn from mining and designated as a Research Natural Area. A primary reason for establishment of the DTNA in its location was because, at the time, it supported the highest known density of desert tortoises.

From 1 March through 31 May 1995, Charles Boland, with assistance from Roxann Clair and Ellen Schaufhauser, served as the naturalist at the DTNA

continued on page 3



The Desert Tortoise Preserve Committee, Inc.

Roger Dale	President
Laura Stockton	Vice President
Tom Dodson	Vice President
Gloria D'Alessandro	Treasurer
Ed LaRue	Recording Secretary
Jayne Chavez-Scales	Corresponding Secretary
Dr. Kristin Berry	Technical Advisor
Bev Steveson	Board Member
John Kalish	Board Member
Peter Gillis	Board Member

continued from page 2

Interpretive Center (IC). The IC includes an interpretive kiosk (established in 1980) and self-guided nature trails which are open for visitor use all year. The kiosk, a 15 x 15 foot shelter, includes four natural history interpretive panels. The self-guided nature trails consist of a plant loop and an animal loop, each approximately 0.5 mile long, and a shorter main loop. The three trails have numbered interpretive trail posts with corresponding trail guides, available in metal boxes at the beginning of each trail. There is also a discovery loop which is approximately 1.75 miles long.

In addition to these year-round facilities, during the spring months the Desert Tortoise Preserve Committee (DTPC) places a motor home, the Desert Tortoise Discovery Center (DTDC), on site. The DTDC is a recreational vehicle thirty-two feet in length, with brightly colored tortoises and other desert fauna and flora painted on its sides. It is used as a base for the naturalists (as well as living quarters this year) and as storage space for the associated educational displays and DTPC fundraising products. The DTDC educational displays include information on Mojave rattlesnakes, black-tailed hares, kit foxes, and common ravens, as well as tortoise shells, a freeze-dried tortoise, and handouts on desert tortoise natural history, upper respiratory tract disease, and DTPC newsletters.

Duties of the naturalists include:

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 IC, 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 trails, monitoring outhouses, and collecting litter.
4. Assisting with DTPC activities: taking part in DTPC programs such as guided tours; selling DTPC fundraising products, such as T-shirts, patches, tie tacks, and postcards.

5. Reporting: preparing a final report for the DTPC, summarizing the activities and observations of the naturalists during the spring season. The report format is similar to that of previous years' reports and contains comparable analyses.

Summary of Activities

During the three-month period from 1 March to 31 May 1995, a naturalist was present 91 of 92 days. Charles Boland was on duty during all of these days; Roxann Clair assisted for seven days, and Ellen Schaufhauser assisted two days. On nine weekend days when visitation was heaviest during April and May two naturalists were on duty and led scheduled tours, interacted with visitors, collected visitation data, and sold DTPC merchandise.

During this time, 978 groups totaling 2,748 individuals were recorded at the Interpretive Center. Thirteen groups (285 individuals) arrived for prearranged tours. Most visitors (91%) were from California. There were visitors from 26 additional states and 14 foreign countries. Of 379 respondents to a visitor survey, most (72%) were first-time visitors. The most common ways that visitors learned about the DTNA included a Los Angeles Times article, road signs, word-of-mouth, travel guides, and maps.

The DTNA was the sole destination for 38% of the visitors. The two most frequently visited attractions that were a part of the outing to the DTNA were Red Rock Canyon State Park and The Poppy Reserve. The most commonly asked question was "Where are they?" concerning the tortoises. Visitors also asked questions about the history and size of the DTNA, the plants, reptiles, birds, mammals, spiders, ants and areas surrounding the DTNA (prominent landmarks, California City, other desert attractions). Two attempts to release a wild desert tortoise as well as one attempt to release a captive tortoise were intercepted. No attempts to collect wild tortoises in the Interpretive Center area were witnessed although numerous people inquired about adoption or care of their pet tortoises. Most visitors read some of the displays at the Desert Tortoise Discovery Center and the interpretive kiosk, and all were interested in seeing tortoises. A total of 232 visitor groups (23%) saw at least one tortoise, and of the

continued on page 4

continued from page 3

746 visitor groups that did not see a tortoise the most common reaction was that they would come back another day at a better time of day to try again.

Interpretive Services

Most groups were greeted in the parking area on arrival and visitor data were collected. The DTDC was parked on the gravel in the west-central part of the parking lot perpendicular to the parking ties. Most interpretive services took place in the parking lot during busy days, but when visitors were few the naturalist would often accompany a group on the trails after a brief introduction at the DTDC.

Interpretive services involved educating visitors about desert tortoises, flora and fauna, and the desert ecosystem and answering questions posed by visitors. Visitor questions usually included basic requests for information concerning recent tortoise sightings and where the trails were located. The educational displays often generated additional questions and provided a topic of conversation. A freeze-dried tortoise, a hatchling shell, juvenile shells showing signs of predation by ravens, and a frozen Mojave rattlesnake served as invaluable educational aids which stimulated discussion on numerous topics such as determining the sex of a tortoise, reproductive biology, bone formation of young tortoises, tortoise vulnerability to predation, other aspects of desert tortoise life history, and the desert eco-system.

The freeze-dried tortoise was a useful exhibit for people who had never seen a desert tortoise and for people who were unable to see a live tortoise during their visit and wanted to photograph one. It was also useful for demonstrating techniques for handling tortoises found on roads. Keeping the tortoise level, not flipping it, and if possible, applying pressure to keep the tail pressed against the body to prevent urination were emphasized. Another topic that was emphasized is that tortoises are wild animals and can be frightened by humans. Following Jane Kid's example (the 1993 naturalist), I would ask visitors if they knew that they actually could scare a tortoise to death by causing it to lose its water.

An effort was made to contact all groups upon departure as well as arrival, to listen to their reports of what they had seen, aid in identification of species, and answer questions that arose during their walks. Field guides were often used with the visitors as visual aids

for identification of species. The notebook *A Compendium of Annual Desert Wildflowers Found in the Desert Tortoise Natural Area* compiled by Betty Forgey and illustrated by the late Jane S. Pinheiro was extremely valuable in assisting visitors in identifying wildflowers seen on their walks. Upper Respiratory Tract Disease (URTD) and other reasons for declines in tortoise populations were common topics of discussion when visitors returned from walks without seeing a tortoise. The raven display and the shells showing signs of predation by ravens led to the topics of raven population growth, its effect on tortoise populations, how the presence of humans has aided raven population growth, and possible raven control measures.

Tortoise natural history talks were given to assorted groups; including Girl and Boy Scouts; elementary, high school and college groups; and a chapter of the California Turtle and Tortoise Club. One student writing a school report on the desert tortoises came to the DTNA to ask questions and to gather information. This student expressed gratitude for the Desert Tortoise Preserve Committee for having a naturalist on site and for making the article "Commonly Asked Questions About the Desert Tortoise and Answers" by Dr. Kristin H. Berry available.

Monitoring

Monitoring included observing visitor conduct and intervening when necessary. Some methods of intervention included intercepting and talking with people when they arrived with a tortoise they wanted to release; reminding visitors that lizards and ants are wild animals that live in the Natural Area and that they are not to be harassed and abused; noting that lizards, even though they are not listed as threatened or endangered, may not be collected or released at the DTNA; and intercepting visitors with dogs and pointing out that dogs are not allowed in the visitor area and the reasons why.

Wildlife sightings by the naturalists, particularly those of tortoises, rattlesnakes, and birds were noted. Visitor sightings of tortoises and rattlesnakes were also recorded. General information on weather (maximum

continued on page 5

continued from page 4

and minimum temperatures and precipitation) was noted on data sheets.

Assistance with Desert Tortoise Preserve Committee Activities

During the spring of 1995, the DTPC conducted one scheduled tour for 39 individuals, and the naturalists participated. The DTPC docent gave an introductory talk and led nature walks to point out additional items of interest and answered questions.

Another duty of the naturalists was to sell DTPC fundraising products. Postcards with photographs of desert species provided a source of conversation and were a good reference for local species' identification.

NATURALIST PROGRAM IS POPULAR WITH LOCAL COMMUNITY

The Preserve Committee was pleased to receive a letter from the California City Chamber of Commerce, complimenting Chuck Boland on an excellent job as the DTNA naturalist for the past two springs. We have reprinted the letter below as a reminder to all of us that the Naturalist Program is an extremely important part of the Committee's work to protect the Natural Area.

May 30, 1995

Mr. Roger Dale, President
Desert Tortoise Preserve Committee, Inc.

Dear Mr. Dale:

As a director of the California City Chamber of Commerce and an active member of our community, I would like to personally commend you and the Committee for your selection of Chuck Boland as the DTNA Naturalist for the past two years. As business people we are sensitive to the fact that we live in an out-of-the-way location and we are constantly looking for ways to accentuate attractions in our area that create destinations for visitors. As such, the DTNA is an excellent destination for many visitors to our city. The demographics of these visitors being that of predominately well educated, professional or retired and family oriented, is much appreciated in our community. Some of these people no doubt choose to return here as visitors and perhaps to relocate in California City.

Chuck Boland has been, in our opinion, an excellent host for the DTNA. His easy going manner and his comfortable command of the information which he easily disseminates to visitors has brought many positive comments back to our Chamber Office. Chuck is probably the most appropriate representation of the "Desert Naturalist" that anyone could hope to find at such a unique outpost in the desert.

The Chamber actively promotes visitors to the DTNA, especially in the spring when the naturalist is present. We have heard many laudatory statements from our members, the local businesses, regarding comments they have heard from patrons about the DTNA and Chuck for the past two years. People are especially surprised that the DTNA is staffed by a knowledgeable and friendly scientist. Their feeling of enrichment is impossible to mistake. Chuck spoke at our monthly Chamber luncheon this past week and all of the business people and guests in attendance were extremely impressed by Chuck's informative presentation. We are very grateful that he was able to speak to our group and we would anticipate asking him to make a presentation next year if we are fortunate enough to have him assigned as our naturalist again.

Be assured that we will continue to promote the DTNA to our visitors and that we will do everything to welcome the Naturalist in early spring and do what we can to make their stay a pleasant one.

Sincerely,

Alan Heaberlin

DTNA WORK PARTIES: YOUR OPPORTUNITY TO BECOME INVOLVED

Since 1984 volunteer crews have gathered at the DTNA once or twice a year to replace signs, mend the fence, weed the main nature trail, clean the interpretive center, revise the nature trails and to complete many other jobs that are necessary for the protection and use of the Natural Area. Many of our dedicated crew members have participated year after year.

If you are interested in being on the notification list for future work parties, please contact:

Laura Stockton, 418 Brookhaven Drive, Bakersfield, CA, 93304, (805) 831-2325.

THE DESERT TORTOISE LOSES A GOOD FRIEND

by Laura Stockton

Gloria Nowak desert tortoise advocate and active Committee member, lost her long battle with cancer on August 25, 1995.

Gloria developed her interest in the desert tortoise while visiting the opal mine of which she and husband Leo were part owners. Gloria and Leo first began working with the DTPC in 1975. Each shared their considerable talents with the dedication that characterizes the individuals who have contributed to the successes of the Committee over the years. Gloria brought with her more than 20 years of professional writing experience, including for several news syndicates. She quickly found her niche as Publicity Chair and expanded her Committee work to include Newsletter Editor, Corresponding Secretary and as a member of the Board of Trustees. Gloria edited the first 26 issues of the quarterly DTPC newsletter, Tortoise Tracks, from the Winter 1979 through 1987. As corresponding secretary she handled a number of captive tortoise inquiries. At the time she and Leo were developing their expertise and reputation in tortoise care and rehabilitation. Gloria's publicity work resulted in a number of articles being printed in southern California newspapers and in magazines such as Desert Magazine. Several of her articles also received national syndicated distribution.

Gloria was active in the Republican party. She held a position as assistant to Assemblyman Phil Wyman and shared her concerns about desert tortoises with him and with Congressman Bill Thomas. Both Phil Wyman and Bill Thomas were supportive of the Desert Tortoise Natural Area, and Congressman Thomas wrote a letter to support federal listing of the tortoise as a threatened species in the late 1980s. Mr. Wyman also attended the Preserve Committee's Annual Meetings.

Gloria resigned as an active member of the Preserve Committee in 1987, partially because of her health. She continued to support the efforts of the DTPC and to be a desert tortoise advocate as she and Leo continued to give tortoise programs to elementary school children

It has been my privilege to work with a number of dedicated, caring, talented and unique people since the beginning of the DTPC. Gloria certainly exemplified

all of those traits and will be missed as a friend and tortoise advocate. Gloria's family has requested that donations in her memory be made to the Rose Varga Discretionary Fund, P.O. Box 2072, Ridgecrest, CA 93556.

In addition, the Committee will be dedicating a special project, such as an educational publication to Gloria.



Gloria Nowak

DESERT TORTOISE COUNCIL TO HOLD 21ST ANNUAL MEETING AND SYMPOSIUM IN MARCH 1996

The 21st Desert Tortoise Council Meeting and Symposium will be held March 29 through 31, 1996, at Sam's Town in Las Vegas Nevada. A field trip is scheduled for Monday, April 1, 1996, following the symposium. A special session on plants is planned to include cryptogams, native versus exotic plants, restoration of native grasses and native annual herbs. Other planned topics include tortoise population sampling, ecosystem plans implementing the Desert Tortoise Recovery Plan, disease and health, culverts and highways, fire, demography, behavior, survivorship, ravens and management.

For those wishing to give a paper, poster, or to have an exhibit, please contact the Symposium Chair: Dr. Kristin Berry, 7006 Westport Street, Riverside, CA 92506.

RESERVATION FOR ANNUAL BANQUET

Please make checks payable to the Desert Tortoise Preserve Committee, Inc. and send to:

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

If you have any questions, please call Roger Dale at (818) 501 - 5219.

CHECKS AND RESERVATION FORMS MUST BE RECEIVED BY JANUARY 5, 1996

Please make a reservation for _____ persons in my name, for the Desert Tortoise Preserve Committee Annual Banquet at the Green Tree Inn, Victorville, California, to be held Saturday, January 13, 1996. I understand that the dinner will be \$17.00 per person, including tax, tip, beverage, and dessert.

I am enclosing a check for \$ _____ , as full payment.

Name: _____ Phone Number: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

Organization (if any): _____

I plan to attend the afternoon business meeting: Yes _____ No _____

A vicinity map for the Annual Meeting and Banquet is provided for your convenience. If you are interested in staying overnight after the banquet, call the Green Tree Inn at (619) 245 - 4361 for reservations and room rate information.

*Reserve Early by Completing and Mailing Your Reservation Form at Your Earliest Convenience.
We look forward to seeing everyone!*

PRESERVE COMMITTEE COMPLETES LARGEST LAND PURCHASE IN ITS 21-YEAR HISTORY!

In early November the Preserve Committee closed escrow on the purchase of 1,360 acres of critical desert tortoise habitat in the western Mojave Desert, completing the single largest land transaction in its 21-year history. The Committee made the purchase in partnership with The Wildlands Conservancy, a newly-formed California land trust. Even more significant than the land itself, the acquired habitat formerly served as the "base property" for a 49,000-acre cattle grazing allotment on federal land. DTPC and The Wildlands Conservancy will now place this allotment under a conservation closure.

The allotment, known as Pilot Knob, is located 25 miles southeast of Ridgecrest on the east side of Cuddeback Dry Lake adjacent to the Naval Air Weapons Station. The base property consists of two 640-acre sections and one 80-acre parcel. All of the land is designated as critical habitat for the desert tortoise and one of the 640-acre sections is part of the Grass Valley Wilderness Area. As part of the purchase of the 1,360 acres of private land, DTPC and The Wildlands Conservancy also acquired all grazing privileges, range improvements and water rights associated with the entire allotment. The acquired range improvements include the historic Blackwater Well and Cabin.

The Preserve Committee would like to thank The Wildlands Conservancy for its role in completing this milestone transaction. We would also like to gratefully acknowledge a substantial bequest from Madeleine Mourlot which made our financial participation in this purchase possible.



Tortoise Tracks

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

Nonprofit Org. Bulk Mail PAID Permit No. 190 San Pedro, CA 90731

Address Correction Requested
