



Summer
2019
Edition 39: 2

Tortoise Tracks

Newsletter



Photo by Sharon Schafer

EVENTS

Naturalist Report

by: **Jack Mazza**

Including photos by Jack Mazza

The naturalist season began in mid-March here in the western Mojave. Due to winter rains, the ground was covered in green as if the desert had changed into a meadow. Plenty of wind, cold temperatures and silence in the transition to spring of those first few weeks. At that point, not much was in bloom, but was budding in abundance. After a little more time, spring had arrived: sparrows, house finches and horned larks singing. By the end of March, the ground had changed from the green of leaves to the bright yellow of goldfields, which carpeted the main trail area. The scent became stronger and stronger...



Early April rolled around, more and more tortoises were being seen. With so many flowers to choose from, they were observed walking through the goldfields searching for blazing stars to eat. This spring was a desert botanists dream, as well over twenty species could be found flowering in early April just on the trails. We enjoyed a few visits from familiar tortoises right here at the Naturalist trailer, seeking shade in the mid-April heat. As well as numerous other sightings of two individuals on the Animal Trail, who could reliably be seen... often courting each other! By the end of April, the yellows and purples of petals had faded to tans and browns as the hot air moved in. Tortoises were still being observed most days, including two juveniles.



May was relatively cool, with a few different storms that came through; even leaving a small dusting of snow in the southern Tehachapis. By this time, the tortoises were not walking around as much, but many more snakes, like the coachwhip, could be found regularly. As the light lingers later in the evening and the summer constellations make their way to the night sky, the 2019 naturalist season has been another great one; full of tortoise sightings, wildflowers, and the peace of the desert.





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
Board of Directors

President Ron Berger
Vice President Bob Wood
Treasurer Laura Stockton
Recording Secretary Rachel Woodard
Board Member Kristin Berry, Ph.D.
Board Member Greg Lathrop
Board Member Larry Nelson
Board Member Dave Zantiny

**Preserve Manager &
Conservation Coordinator**
Brittany Slabach, Ph.D.

Director of Land Acquisition
Jun Lee

Telephone: (951) 683-3872
Fax: (951) 683-6949
Email: dtpc@pacbell.net
www.tortoise-tracks.org



Tortoise Tracks is published
four times a year.

Spring Work Party: Continuing the Fight against Non-native Invasives

Unfortunately, the large amount of rain received during the winter not only helped the native vegetation. In the western expansion area, where we have been working to fight the invasion of Russian Thistle and several species of invasive mustards, the area affected by these species has grown.

Several past work parties have focused on removing and controlling these species before they reach the interior of the DTRNA. This year has been no different. On March 16, volunteers again braved the strong winds to help manually remove mustards and Russian thistle from a parcel in the northwestern corner of the DTRNA expansion areas. Land monitoring performed by DTPC staff and volunteers have shown that the mustards, *Brassica tournifortii* in particular, is rapidly encroaching on the perimeter of the DTRNA and growing in density. Prevalence of Russian thistle was down significantly since last year's work party.

Volunteers removed dozens of large contractor bags full of mostly mustard, followed by dozens of additional bags removed at later dates. The DTPC will continue to fight the invasion of non-native species and is working with local partners to implement best management practices.



Volunteer Vincent LaVeque carries invasive mustards just pulled from Cache Creek (Photo by Jill Estrada)



Volunteers load mustard into the DTPC truck (Photo by Jill Estrada)

Meet a Director: Greg Lathrop

Greg received his Bachelors of Arts degree in Economics from University of the Pacific in Stockton, CA. His post graduate studies took place at San Diego State University in Business Administration. Greg started his financial career as a management trainee with a major bank. He retired after 39 years in the banking industry with experience in operations, branch management, commercial lending, trust administration and business asset management. Greg's final position was as Vice President and Manager of 13 state region for the Business Advisory Group in the Wealth Management division of Wells Fargo & Co. managing over \$2 billion in assets.



Photo provided by Greg Lathrop

2019: Wildflower Superbloom!

The large amounts of rain that were received in the Mojave Desert during this past winter did not disappoint us when the season changed. In March, purple carpets of gilias began popping up throughout the DTRNA area. Shortly thereafter, alkali goldfields dotted the landscape, creating a stunning mixture of purples, yellows, and greens that resembled a painting. The progression of wildflowers continued with Bigelow's coreopsis, lacy phacelia, and desert candles joining a myriad of other familiar species which added to the allure of the scene. With the flowers came a host of wildlife activity including our beloved desert tortoises, antelope ground squirrels, painted ladies, and numerous others.



The last time we saw this array of color and wildlife activity was in 2017. That year saw a boost in visitor numbers at the Desert Tortoise Research Natural Area as well as the percentage of visitors that observed at least one desert tortoise. 2018 left us feeling deprived, after a relatively dry winter that brought few wildflowers that spring. Luckily for us (and the tortoises), the

rain returned this year.

The increase in climate variation begs the questions of how often we will see these amounts of precipitation and how those fluctuations will affect the flora and fauna of the



desert. The uncertainty that comes each spring sheds light on the need to focus on large-scale habitat conservation. The Desert Tortoise Preserve Committee takes these questions seriously, which is why

we are using adaptive management and collaborating with local and regional partners to target areas within and outside the critical habitat range of the desert tortoise for protection and restoration.



DTPC Calendar of Events & Volunteer Opportunities

- **May 31, 2019—End of Naturalist Season at DTRNA**
- **Fall Work Party—TBD**

LAND MANAGEMENT

Trespassing Sheep Leads to Restoration Funds

During the 2017 naturalist season, the on-site naturalist observed a flock of sheep grazing just outside the Desert Tortoise Research Natural Area fence line. Upon closer examination with a telephoto lens, she saw that some of the sheep had jumped over the fence and had begun grazing within the DTRNA.

After noticing the illegal trespass of sheep and taking pictures, the naturalist notified the proper authorities. The shepherd was confronted about the incident; however, the event reoccurred. The authorities took the owner of the sheep to court, where a restitution of \$25,000 was issued. Thanks to the diligence of a certain officer, the Desert Tortoise Preserve Committee was granted a right to the restitution, to be used for restoration and fencing of the DTRNA expansion area.



Large flock of sheep grazing just outside DTRNA (Photo by Sharon Schafer)

The issue described above highlights the importance of the work we have done over the last few years to fence and restore

many of the contiguous areas of land we own and manage in the DTRNA expansion areas. Without the protective fencing, grazers can legally allow their flock to graze and trample our property. Sheep grazing on private property is legal in many areas of the West due to "open range" laws established in the 1800s. These laws state that private landowners are responsible for building fences to keep grazing cattle and other livestock off their property. In 1967, California further established that in any county or part of a county designated as chiefly devoted to grazing, a private landowner is required to have a good and substantial fence to prevent grazing on their property.

In 1987, Kern County updated their Estray Ordinance originally established in 1942. The Board of Supervisors designated the majority of eastern Kern County as devoted chiefly to grazing. While the City of Ridgecrest and community of Cantil are excluded, the area surrounding California City has this designation. The Desert Tortoise Research Natural Area is legally excluded from livestock grazing because it is mostly public land or fenced, private land. Grazing can be extremely damaging to a habitat as hundreds of sheep will trample wildflowers, eat most vegetation, and can collapse wildlife burrows.



Sheep grazing inside the DTRNA fence (photo by Sharon Schafer)

Since the installation of approximately 17 miles over the past three years, we have seen flora and fauna within these new fence lines begin to restore themselves. This court ordered restitution will help us to continue our work in other hard-hit areas adjacent to the DTRNA

PLEASE WELCOME BRITTANY SLABACH, PhD, OUR NEW PRESERVE MANAGER AND CONSERVATION COORDINATOR

Dr. Brittany Slabach has accepted the position of DTPC Preserve Manager and Conservation Coordinator, and will start officially on July 1st. She replaces Jillian Estrada, who had been in the position and had done a terrific job since 2015. Jillian relocated to Michigan to be closer to family and accepted a wonderful position with the Great Lakes Commission in Michigan as Habitat Restoration Program Specialist. We wish her well in her new position. Jillian continues working on a number of DTPC projects as well. In fact, she edited and wrote most of this issue of Tortoise Tracks!

Brittany earned her Bachelor's in Human Ecology from the College of the Atlantic in Bar Harbor, Maine in 2009, her Masters in Biology from Tufts University in Medford, Maine in 2012, and her doctorate in Philosophy of Biology from the University of Kentucky in 2018. Most recently, she served as project manager and lead researcher of the Kentucky Cow Elk project and as a graduate visiting instructor at the University of Kentucky.

Brittany numbers hiking, backpacking, photography, charcoal drawings as well as cooking and candy making among her hobbies. Everyone at DTPC looks forward to working with Brittany and to continue working with Jillian.



Dr. Sabach in the Galapagos Islands

CHARITABLE GIVING THROUGH INDIVIDUAL RETIREMENT ACCOUNTS

For decades, many donors found their generosity rewarded when it came time to file their taxes because they could claim an itemized deduction for their contributions. Tax law changes in 2018 changed this benefit for many of us.

Donors age 70.5 and above, however, can give and receive a tax benefit available to them through a unique strategy. Shortly after reaching that special age, annual minimum distributions (RMD) are required from an Individual Retirement Account (IRA). But, when charitable gifts of up to \$100,000 per taxpayer are made directly from an IRA to a charity, the gift counts toward the minimum distribution and is not included in taxable income. This tax benefit is like a deduction because the income was never received.

The DTPC and the donor both benefit from this unique strategy. If you are interested in pursuing a gift via your IRA please contact DTPC Board Member Greg Lathrop at 415-637-7187 or at 2redgrey@gmail.com for more information and assistance.

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"/> \$100 Benefactor |
| <input type="checkbox"/> \$40 Family | <input type="checkbox"/> \$200 Patron/Corporate |
| <input type="checkbox"/> \$75 Sponsor | <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 endowment. Please accept an additional donation of:

- | | |
|----------------------------------|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> \$250 | <input type="checkbox"/> \$2,500 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> \$500 | <input type="checkbox"/> \$5,000 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> \$1,000 | <input type="checkbox"/> Other \$_____ |

- Marketable Securities (Stock): Contact DTPC Finance Committee Chairperson, Greg Lathrop at 2redgrey@gmail.com or (415) 637-7187 for instruction

Let's grow the endowment!

- I would like my contribution to remain anonymous
 I would like to receive Tortoise Tracks electronically (please provide email address)

Name: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

Email Address: _____

Please make your check payable to DTPC and mail to:

Desert Tortoise Preserve Committee
4067 Mission Inn Ave.
Riverside, CA 92501.

Thank you.

*All contributors receive the Tortoise Tracks newsletter. The Desert Tortoise Preserve Committee is an IRS recognized tax-exempt 501(c)(3) nonprofit corporation. All contributions and/or annual membership dues are fully tax-deductible. Contributor information is kept confidential and is not disclosed to third parties.

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



Tortoise Tracks

NONPROFIT ORG.
U.S. POSTAGE
PAID
RIVERSIDE, CA
PERMIT NO. 3216

THE DESERT TORTOISE PRESERVE COMMITTEE
4067 MISSION INN AVENUE
RIVERSIDE, CALIFORNIA 92501

Address Service Requested

Thank you for being a member

Membership expiration date:

 When you shop [@AmazonSmile](#), Amazon will make a donation to Desert Tortoise Preserve Committee Inc. <http://smile.amazon.com/ch/23-7413415>

 Find us on Facebook
www.Facebook.com/DTPC.inc



Electronic copies of *Tortoise Tracks* are in **COLOR!**
If you would prefer to receive an electronic copy, notify us by email at dtpc@pacbell.net

Volunteer Corner

Volunteer Needs:

Fence Monitoring—The DTPC owns and manages more than 50 miles of fencing in and around the DTRNA and expansion areas which need to be monitored and repaired as needed.

Land Monitoring— We are in need of trained land monitoring teams to help us tackle the task of monitoring our parcels. Monitoring will resume in March. If you would like to become trained, please contact us at dtpc@pacbell.net

Our electronic newsletter is growing in popularity and we want to see it continue to grow! One added benefit of receiving the e-newsletter is that it is provided in color and is received sooner than those that are mailed. If you would like to be added to our e-newsletter list, please email us at dtpc@pacbell.net.

GO GREEN