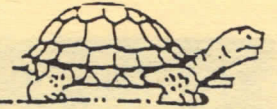


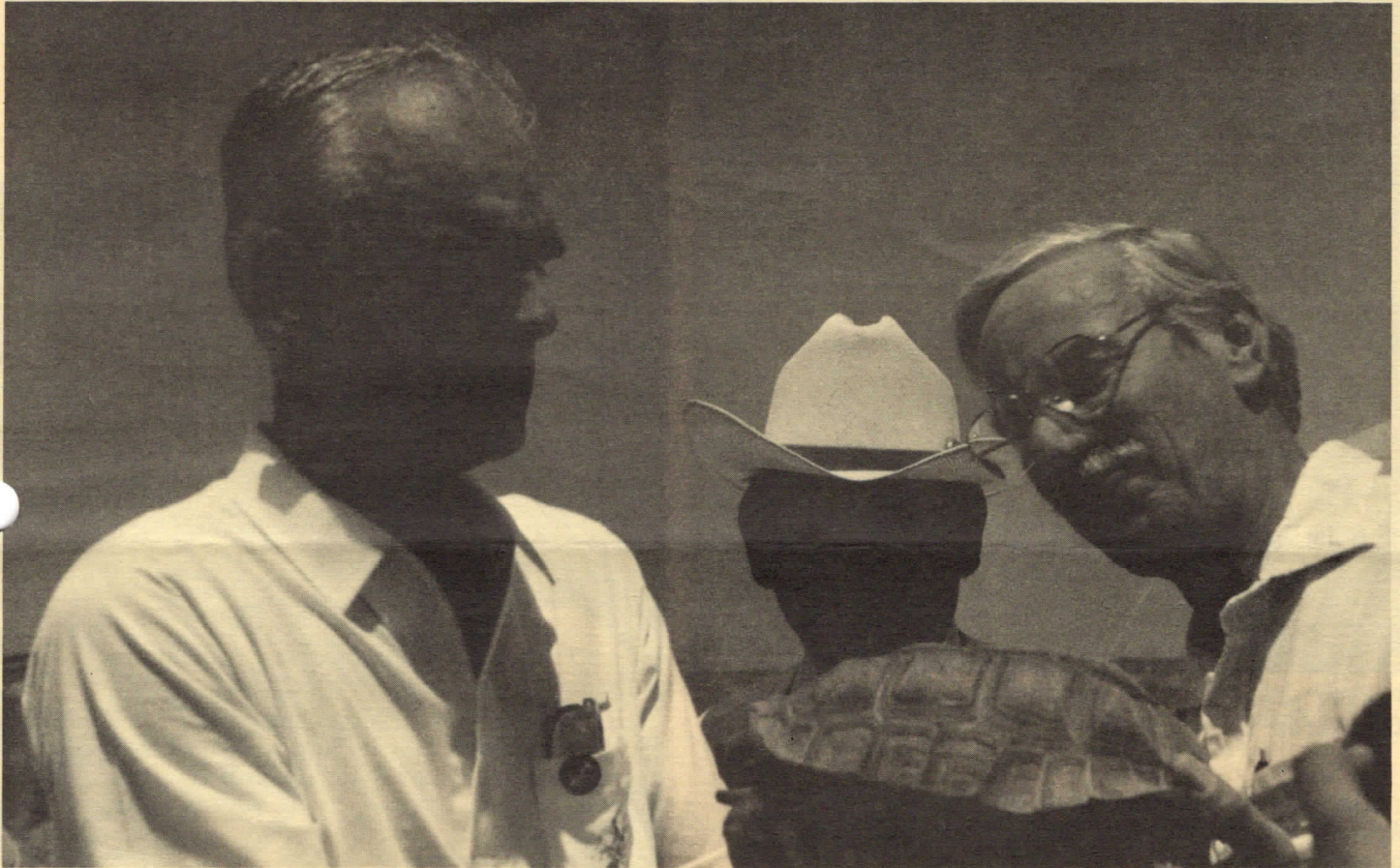
# TORTOISE TRACKS



THE DESERT TORTOISE PRESERVE COMMITTEE NEWSLETTER  
P.O. Box 453, Ridgecrest, CA 93555

SUMMER, 1988  
Volume 9, No. 2

## INTERIOR SECRETARY VISITS DESERT TORTOISE NATURAL AREA



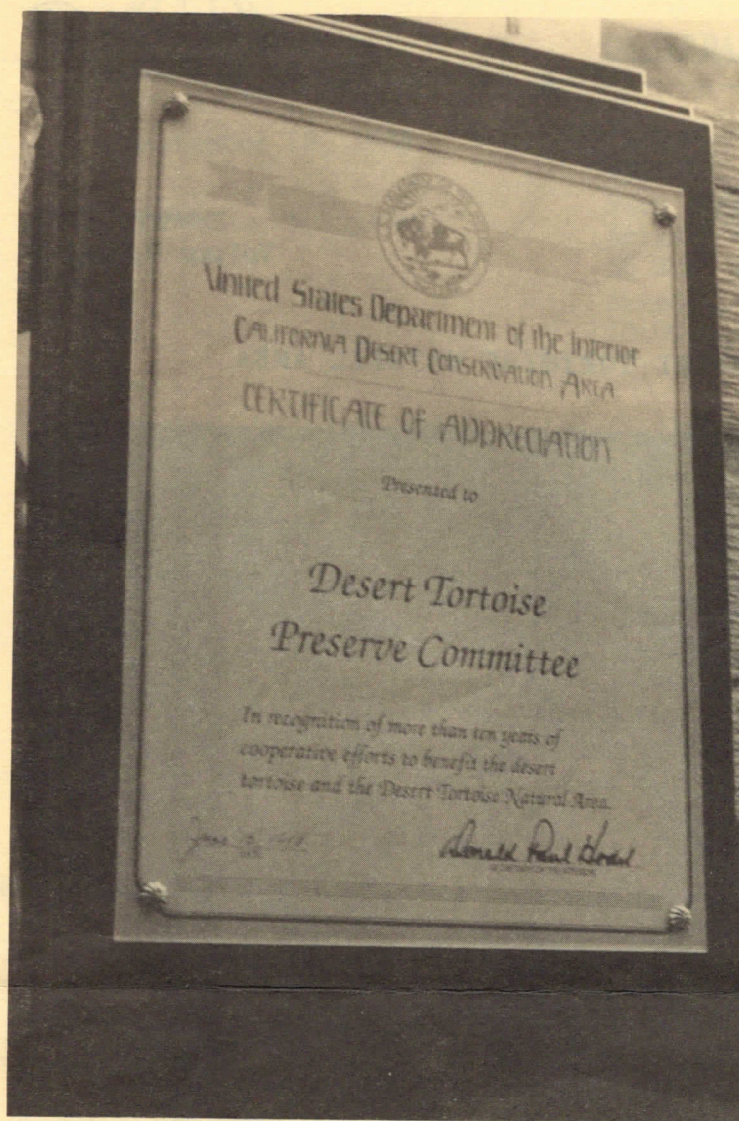
Donald Hodel, left, and George Moncsko, President of the Desert Tortoise Preserve Committee, study desert tortoise at the Natural Area.

Secretary of the Interior Donald Hodel visited the Desert Tortoise Natural Area on Tuesday, June 21, 1988. Mr. Hodel was escorted by Ed Hastey, State Director of the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), and Gerald Hillier, the Bureau's Desert District Manager. The stop was part of a three-day tour of the California Desert Conservation Area, which covers almost one-quarter of California. Approximately one-half of that area is administered by BLM.

Arriving at noon via a fleet of military helicopters, the group was met by

approximately 100 people, including Patty McLean, BLM Ridgecrest Resource Area Manager, BLM staff members, and many representatives of the news media. In addition to Desert Tortoise Preserve Committee members, some of the organizations represented include the Desert Tortoise Council, California Turtle and Tortoise Club, Defenders of Wildlife, Audubon Society, Sierra Club, California Department of Fish and Game, and the American Motorcycle Association. A tasty box lunch was provided for all attending by U. S. Borax.





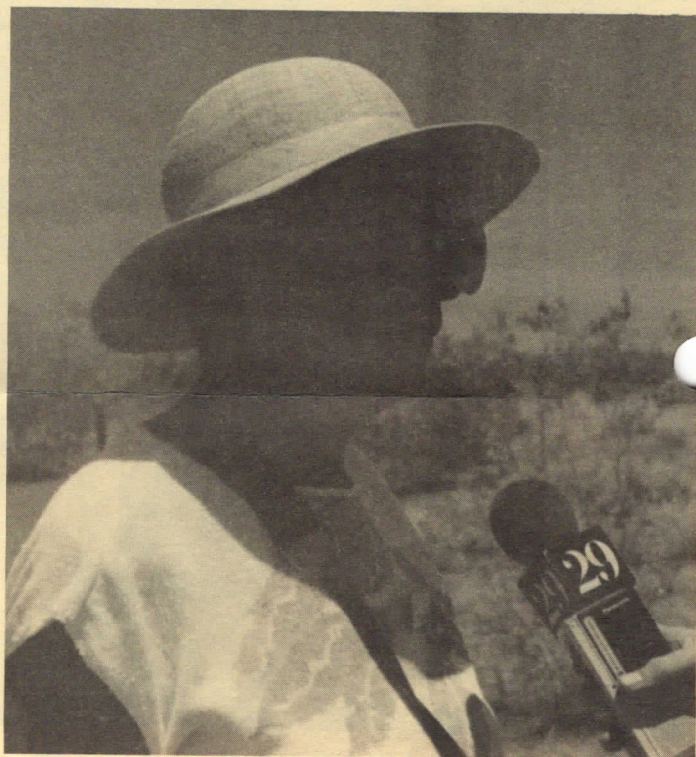
Plaque presented to Desert Tortoise Preserve Committee by Secretary of the Interior Hodel.

During ceremonies held at the Natural Area's Interpretive Center, the Secretary honored the Desert Tortoise Preserve Committee for more than 10 years of protecting the desert tortoise and the Desert Tortoise Natural Area.

A group award was presented to the Desert Tortoise Preserve Committee, American Motorcycle Association, District 37, California Off-Road Vehicle Association, California Enduro Association, Desert Tortoise Council, Desert Construction Company, Bertrand Trucking Enterprises, and Trona Railway Company for cooperative volunteer services at the Natural Area last February.

The California Turtle and Tortoise Club was also honored for financial donations to the Desert Tortoise Natural Area and the group's efforts to educate the public about desert tortoises.

Mr. Hodel also swore in three new BLM desert rangers -- Donovan Dollar, Anthony Lue, and Mary Trautner. BLM is expanding its desert ranger force from 22 to 42 this year. Each is a Federal law enforcement officer assigned to a particular sector of public lands administered by BLM's California Desert District. Members of the Committee then had an opportunity to meet Don Dollar, who is now responsible for the sector which includes the Natural Area. Don expressed pleasure with his assignment and eagerness to get started. The Committee is looking forward to working with him, confident that his presence will be of great benefit to the tortoise and the Natural Area.



Betty Forgey, Founding President of the Desert Tortoise Preserve Committee, interviewed at Natural Area ceremonies.

Betty and her husband, Warren, have been instrumental over the years in representing the tortoise and the Natural Area. This spring Betty, currently serving on the Board of Trustees as Recording Secretary, took on the job of coordinating an expanded guided tour program ... See Page 7.

Thank you, Betty, for a job well done!





## LIFELINE FUND REPORT

Concerning my continuing education on all things tortoise, I'm proud to report that I survived the

Committee's rigorous training course for Desert Tortoise Natural Area tour guides and, together with several other new guides this spring, was been duly admitted into their ranks. I wasted no time in putting my new knowledge to use, working with other guides to provide an interesting desert experience for visiting groups from such diverse organizations as the Southwestern Herpetologists Society, Laguna Hills Audubon Society, and Los Angeles Downtown Women's Center.

I expect I've learned as much from the tours as the visitors have, and am applying it as we develop our programs for better public education and visitor service. Spring has also been a time for contacts with new potential funding sources, particularly foundations. Several are considering our proposals, and others have left the possibility for reapplication next year. An exciting possibility of a breakthrough in major corporate support for our land acquisition and public information programs is developing, and I expect to be able to bring you details of that in the next newsletter. Stay tuned!

The occasion of the annual Desert Tortoise Council Symposium provided us an opportunity to confer with Tom Langton of the London-based Fauna and Flora Preservation Society (FFPS). Tom is a member of the Lifeline Fund Advisory Board, and we discussed ways FFPS can contribute further to our efforts. Another visiting Briton, David Stubbs, took the opportunity to see the Natural Area, and shared his experience leading a very successful tortoise conservation program for the Hermann's tortoise in southern France.

Other activities of note included slide presentations to the Southwestern Herpetologists Society and the Audubon Society's Southern California Coordinating Council. Both societies are strong supporters of the Desert Tortoise Preserve Committee (DTPC), and I appreciated the opportunity to inform them about the desert tortoise and our work. The coordinating Council meeting focused on the California Desert Protection Act (S.7) introduced by Senator Alan Cranston. Ed Hastey, State Director of the Bureau of Land Management, also addressed the meeting.

As a result of our efforts to expand the outlets for DTPC fundraising products, Committee products are now on sale at the Los Angeles County Eaton Canyon Nature Center Gift Shop, and promising contacts have been made with other outlets in the Los Angeles area. If you know of a shop that might be interested in carrying DTPC products, please let the Committee know and we will be happy to contact them.

Curtis Horton,  
Executive Director, Lifeline Fund  
Desert Tortoise Preserve Committee

## LOS ANGELES DOWNTOWN WOMEN'S CENTER GROUP TOURS NATURAL AREA

Most people can visit the Desert Tortoise Natural Area (DTNA) whenever they wish, but some don't have that choice. And those may be the ones who would benefit most from a California desert wilderness experience. In an effort to expand access for those who lack the resources to get away from inner city life and out into nature, the Desert Tortoise Preserve Committee worked with the Los Angeles Downtown Women's Center to organize a DTNA tour for its clients. The Downtown Women's Center provides a wide range of daytime and residential services for elderly and/or psychologically disabled women in a disadvantaged area of Los Angeles.

A chartered bus for the tour was funded by the City of Los Angeles and a donation from Curtis Horton, who accompanied the group. Despite a cool, cloudy day, a festive spirit prevailed among the participants. A stop for lunch at the city park in California City was enjoyed by all, including the resident ducks and geese.

Met at the DTNA by guides Betty Forgey and Jayne Chavez-Scales, the visitors were introduced to the wildlife of the desert and explored the Interpretive Center nature trails. To the surprise of the guides and the delight of the tour members, one young tortoise was spotted braving the cold. Its shell was edged with earth damp from the previous night's rain. Late-blooming wildflowers added color throughout the trip. A day's relief from the urban landscape was a therapeutic change for many participants, and all returned home refreshed and with the hope that the trip could be repeated next spring. □



RESPIRATORY DISEASE DISCOVERED  
IN TORTOISES AT  
DESERT TORTOISE NATURAL AREA

In May, diseased tortoises were discovered in the interior of the Desert Tortoise Natural Area by contractors conducting routine surveys for the Bureau of Land Management (BLM). The BLM monitors the status of desert tortoise populations at 15 sites throughout the California desert. One of the monitoring sites or study plots is in the northern interior of the Natural Area. Tortoises at this site were studied in 1973, 1974, and 1978. Formal population surveys were conducted in 1979, 1982, and this spring. Data from the 1979 and 1982 surveys indicated that the adult tortoise population in the interior part of the Natural Area was thriving and had relatively low mortality rates.

The 1988 surveys indicate that many adult tortoises have died on the interior plot in the last six years, far more than normal. Disease may be the major cause of the losses. Some live adult tortoises are sick, perhaps 5 to 20% of the population. Two sick tortoises were taken to a veterinarian, Dr. Walter Roskopf, for examination and testing. Dr. Roskopf identified the disease as a contagious, viral respiratory infection, similar to that commonly observed in captive tortoises. The disease was probably brought to the Natural Area by an infected captive tortoise, which was released illegally.

Needless to say, we are very concerned about this new issue and are giving it a high priority. We are pursuing the matter with the California Department of Fish and Game, the Fish and Wildlife Service, and experts in tortoise diseases and physiology. We need answers to many questions, such as:

- What percentage of population is infected?
- How far has the disease spread?
- How contagious is the disease?
- How many forms does the disease take?
- How should the diseased animals be handled or treated?

We will keep you informed of our progress and activities. In the meantime, please help us by informing your friends and contacts about the dangers of returning captive tortoises to the wild. (Please see following article.)

Kristin H. Berry  
U. S. Bureau of Land Management

PLEASE DON'T RELEASE TORTOISES

AT THE DESERT TORTOISE NATURAL AREA  
OR ANYWHERE IN THE DESERT

Members of the Desert Tortoise Preserve Committee and staff with the Bureau of Land Management frequently hear about people who have released captive tortoises at the Desert Tortoise Natural Area. Some people have even collected wild tortoises elsewhere in the desert and taken them to the Natural Area for release. For example, in April, two people were observed releasing two large tortoises — probably captives — near the kiosk.

Unfortunately, releases of either captive or wild tortoises threaten the well-being and integrity of the Natural Area. California Department of Fish and Game policy and regulations prohibit such releases. The Department of Fish and Game has requested members of the Board of Trustees of the Desert Tortoise Preserve Committee and Bureau of Land Management staff to collect released captives at the Natural Area or elsewhere in the desert whenever captives are observed. The captive tortoises will be placed in the Department of Fish and Game's captive tortoise adoption program.

We request that our members help educate the public about the dangers of captive releases and about moving wild tortoises from one place to another. The following are a few of the more compelling reasons.

(1) Captive tortoises can transmit diseases to the wild populations, which are normally free of disease. We have observed and collected diseased captives at the Natural Area.

(2) Tortoises from different parts of the geographic range have different genetic compositions and are adapted to live in distinctive habitats and under local climatic regimes. Recent studies on the mitochondrial DNA and morphology of desert tortoises indicate that at least three major and three minor genetic and morphological units are present. Experts emphasize the importance of not mixing the genetic groups because of lowered "fitness" and higher mortality rates.

(3) Release of captive tortoises is not humane. Mortality rates are high and the captive is likely to suffer a lingering death.



(4) Moving wild tortoises from one place to another is prohibited and cannot be undertaken legally without special permits. Mortality is high, and the potential for the relocated animals to suffer is high. Many individuals try to return home, and others get involved in aggressive interactions with resident tortoises. □

HELP IS READILY AVAILABLE when a captive desert tortoise is in need of a new home. Please keep the following telephone numbers handy and share the information when you have the opportunity.

Contact the California Department of Fish and Game:

(213) 590-5132 - Ask for Jim St. Amant  
(714) 597-8235 - Ask for Frank Hoover

Or contact the California Turtle and Tortoise Club, sanctioned by the California Department of Fish and Game to accept captive tortoises and relocate them with families who wish to "adopt" a tortoise:

(714) 962-0612 - Ask for  
Martha Young-Wheeler

### MEET THE MEMBERS OF YOUR BOARD OF TRUSTEES

Since many of our readers have not had the opportunity to become acquainted with the members of the Desert Tortoise Preserve Committee's Board of Trustees, future issues of Tortoise Tracks will highlight these dedicated people, who give so freely of their time and talents to the cause of the desert tortoise.

Members meet approximately every eight weeks, travelling from such divergent points in California as Bakersfield, Boron, Palm Springs, Redlands, Ridgecrest, San Bernardino, San Diego and Truckee. Their backgrounds, occupations, and interests are as diversified as their places of residence. However, when they assemble to direct the efforts of the Committee, it is with a common purpose — to promote the welfare of the desert tortoise in the wild.

George Moncsko, President

Although supportive of the Desert Tortoise Preserve Committee since its founding, George did not join the Board of Trustees until 1983 and was elected President the following year.

A man of many interests -- including birdwatching, geology, botany, mineral collecting, hunting and fishing -- George brings to the Committee an intense interest in habitat acquisition and management, believing that "without the land...we have nothing."

A native of Long Island, New York, and moving to California in 1963, George currently resides in Ridgecrest, where he is active in the community. An engineer employed by the Navy at China Lake Naval Weapons Center, he presently heads the Radar and Threat Technology Division in the Electronic Warfare Department.

His agenda has been to do forward planning to avoid crisis management, emphasize land acquisition and completion of perimeter fencing, see mitigation and compensation become a fixture of desert development, improve the Committee's relations with the Bureau of Land Management, and -- last, but not least -- to see a stable maintenance program enacted on the Desert Tortoise Natural Area.

George has brought to the position of President multi-faceted ability as a leader. The blends of strength with sensitivity, dedication to purpose with vision, logic with imagination have enabled him to inspire tremendous progress toward the Committee's goals. □

### LAURA STOCKTON HONORED

Laura Stockton of Bakersfield, steadfast Desert Tortoise Preserve Committee member currently serving as Vice-President, recently received the California Living Museums Presidential Award for outstanding and dedicated service in their docent program, the educational program and continued work on the Tortoise Exhibit.

CONGRATULATIONS, LAURA!

### TELEVISION PROGRAM TO FEATURE NATURAL AREA

The Desert Tortoise Natural Area will be featured in one of eight segments of a National Geographic "Explorer" series on the Mojave Desert. According to latest information available, the film will be aired in the fall. Tortoise Tracks hopes to bring you dates and times in the next issue. □





## GREETINGS FROM THE BLM CORNER

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) Ridgecrest Resource Area Staff have been very busy since the last newsletter due to Spring fieldwork and recruiting to fill new positions. Three new rangers were hired in May and their training has begun.

Don Dollar will replace John Kalish as the Sector Ranger for the Desert Tortoise Natural Area. Don comes to us with several years' experience as a Ranger for the National Park Service in Tennessee. Don and his family are in the midst of buying a home in California City and settling into their new life out west. John will continue to help at the Natural Area to back up Don.

Mary Trautner and Dave Wash are also settling into their new posts in Lone Pine and Ridgecrest, respectively. Mary was a Ranger at Death Valley National Monument before transferring to BLM. She will monitor the area from Walker Pass to Olancho and over to Darwin. Dave joins us from the Corps of Engineers in Oregon. After he completes three months' training at the Federal Law Enforcement Training Academy in Glynco, Georgia, he will be responsible for monitoring the area from Cuddeback Dry Lake north to Searles Lake.

Sheep grazing was very active this spring in the Ridgecrest Resource Area. Approximately 21 permits were issued for approximately 40 bands of sheep. Most of the sheep have moved on to greener pastures, literally, since our forage has rapidly dried up. BLM Rangers actively monitored sheep grazing on public lands and issued 11 notices of trespass to unauthorized grazers.

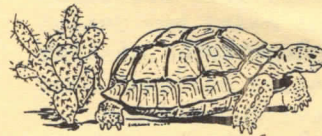
On a recent field trip in the Fremont Valley, I spotted three juveniles, one adult, and one hatchling tortoise in a two-hour period. The sightings made the field trip much more enjoyable, especially seeing the new hatchling.

Patty McLean, Area Manager  
Bureau of Land Management  
Ridgecrest Resource Area

"FROM THE BLM CORNER" Postscript... Fire came within one fourth mile of the northwest corner of the Desert Tortoise Natural Area on May 26, 1988. Efforts of Kern County and BLM Fire crews -- using 30 fire fighters, 7 engines, 1 helicopter, 1 water tender, 1

fuel tender, and 1 bulldozer -- controlled the blaze in eight hours and limited the loss to 300 acres. No Natural Area lands were burned. High winds spread the fire, which was apparently started by trash burning out of control. As this newsletter goes to press, several BLM staff members are surveying the area to determine the impacts on the tortoise. □

## 13th ANNUAL SYMPOSIUM HOSTED BY DESERT TORTOISE COUNCIL



The Riverside Resort, on the banks of the Colorado River at Laughlin, Nevada, was the site of the Desert Tortoise Council's 13th Annual Symposium. Approximately 150 people attended meetings held Saturday and Sunday, March 26th and 27th, during which papers were presented covering a wide array of subjects pertinent to the desert tortoise. Keynote Speaker, Dr. Peter Brussard, Professor and Chair of the Biology Department at Montana State University, discussed minimum viable population size and preserve size and shape -- both critical factors in preventing the desert tortoise from joining the ranks of the extinct.

Saturday evening gave those attending an opportunity to relax, renew old friendships, and to make new acquaintances at the annual banquet. A highlight of the evening was the raffle which offered an abundance of attractive prizes and lots of laughs. Hats off to Ray Butler, Raffle Coordinator and "Auctioneer," for making this very worthwhile fundraiser a success!

Participating in the Symposium's field trip Monday morning, approximately 30 people braved cold brisk winds to visit the proposed nuclear waste disposal site at Ward Valley, located adjacent to Interstate 40, west of Needles, California. They then ventured a bit further west into California to visit several yucca harvest sites, where they observed the devastation resulting from permitted harvesting of yucca for commercial purposes...and the incredibly slow rate of recovery.

The Council members responsible for planning and coordinating the Symposium deserve credit for achieving success once again! Many who attended have already blocked out time on their 1989 calendars for the 14th Symposium. Tortoise Tracks will keep you posted as details become available. □



### CONGRATULATIONS TO PHOTOGRAPHY CONTEST WINNERS

Several members of the Desert Tortoise Preserve Committee were among the award winners in the Desert Tortoise Council's Eighth Annual Desert Photography Contest, held in conjunction with their Symposium:

#### Black/White Prints

##### FIRST and SECOND

Jerry Hall: Desert Tortoise Category,  
Captive Division.

#### Color Slides

##### FIRST, SECOND and THIRD

Warren Forgey: Desert Scenics and  
Wild Flowers Divisions.

##### THIRD

Betty Forgey: Other Desert Reptiles  
Division, Wild Category.

### NATURAL AREA GUIDED TOUR SEASON REPORT

California City fourth grade students, Laguna Audubon Society members, California Turtle and Tortoise Club members and Hi-Desert Gardeners Club members are just a few of the 19 groups that participated in guided tours of the Desert Tortoise Natural Area (DTNA) this spring. The tours, which began March 26th and ended May 17th, served approximately 500 visitors in groups ranging from 4 to 50 participants.

Tour guides, some of whom began their training in March, emphasized the importance of preserving natural habitat and the evolution and life cycle of the desert tortoise and identified plant and animal species native to the area. They also pointed out plants introduced by grazing sheep and other results of "multiple uses" of the desert. School groups were given checklists of plants and animals found at the DTNA and were challenged to find as many as possible.

Weather during the season ranged from "very hot" to "bitterly cold", affecting numbers of animals seen and length of tours. Alan Baldwin's two groups of Gifted and Talented Education (G.A.T.E.) students saw two baby tortoises, three adult tortoises, one coyote kill and three varieties of snakes on a pleasant day. Jill Boone's group from San Jose had good weather but saw only one tortoise.

Warren and Betty Forgey coordinated and scheduled the tours and Laura Stockton supervised the pre-season tour-guide

training. Those who participated in the training, on introductory and refresher levels, were treated to most varieties of flowering plants.

Connie Wheeler, Tour Guide  
Desert Tortoise Preserve Committee

Tortoise Tracks' editor thanks Connie for contributing the above report.

Connie, together with Judy Breitenstein, Jayne Chavez-Scales, Curtis Horton, and Robin and Jan Kittredge, attended the tour guide training session in March. She reports that, in addition to appreciating the opportunity to increase her knowledge of the flora and fauna of the Natural Area, she enjoyed assisting in leading two tours — and she is looking forward to participating again in the future.

Betty Forgey, Tour Coordinator, and the guides who have served in previous years...Warren Forgey, Mary Ann Henry, Carol and Clay Panlaqui, Bev Steveson, Laura Stockton, and Georgette Theotig...welcomed the new recruits. However, it soon became apparent that the demand for tours required additional help. Special kudos go to Stephen and Gladys Barnes and Patrice Gould, who Betty recruited after the training session ... and who gladly assisted when help was desperately needed.

#### Guided Tours

##### A "Good News/Bad News" Story

As noted above, the good news is that approximately 500 people participated in guided tours this spring. The bad news is that many requests for tours had to be turned down. Just one example -- Mimi Loutrell, who planned the tour for the California Turtle and Tortoise Club, reports interest ran so high among club members that, while 50 people attended the tour, more than 50 had to be turned away. The Committee apologizes and hopes to be able to provide many additional tours next spring!

More Tour Talk in the Fall Issue

### NEW ACTIVE MEMBERS

The Board of Trustees of the Desert Tortoise Preserve Committee has accepted Robin and Jan Kittredge of California City as Active Members and looks forward to their participation in Committee activities.

Welcome, Robin and Jan!



CALENDAR

September 18, 1988

CALIFORNIA TURTLE and TORTOISE CLUB  
FOOTHILL CHAPTER  
24th ANNUAL TURTLE and TORTOISE SHOW  
Arcadia Masonic Lodge  
50 West Duarte Road  
Arcadia, California  
10:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.

October 1 and 2, 1988

CALIFORNIA TURTLE and TORTOISE CLUB  
INLAND EMPIRE CHAPTER  
4th ANNUAL TURTLE and TORTOISE SHOW  
San Bernardino County Museum  
2024 Orange Tree Lane  
Redlands, California  
Saturday - 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.  
Sunday - 1:00 p.m. to 5:00 p.m.

PLAN AHEAD ... for the 14th Annual Desert Tortoise Council Symposium to be held in late March, 1989. Watch for details in future Tortoise Tracks.

TORTOISE TRACKS is published quarterly by the Desert Tortoise Preserve Committee, Inc.  
Jean Jones, Editor

DESERT TORTOISE PRESERVE COMMITTEE, INC.  
P.O. Box 453, Ridgecrest, CA 93555

Non-Profit  
Bulk Mailing  
Permit No. 76  
Ridgecrest, CA  
93555

ADDRESS CORRECTION REQUESTED



1.38  
Loretta A. Stockton  
6201 Wible Rd., #66  
Bakersfield, CA 93313