

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



FALL, 1988 Volume 9, No. 3

FULL-TIME NATURALIST URGENTLY NEEDED FOR DESERT TORTOISE NATURAL AREA NEXT SPRING

The Desert Tortoise Preserve Committee's Board of Trustees recently identified a very high priority project for fund-raising with members, donors and new supporters. Our goal for 1988 and early 1989 is to raise at least \$20,000 from our membership to support a full-time, skilled naturalist/manager at the Natural Area interpretive area next spring and to purchase an attractive motorhome to park at the interpretive area as a temporary visitor headquarters and living space for the naturalist.

Our project has the full support of the Bureau of Land Management and hopefully will become part of the federal Challenge Grant Program. Under the Challenge Grant Program, funds raised for our project will be matched with an equivalent amount of federal funds. Thus, if we raise \$20,000, our dollars can be matched with \$20,000 from the Bureau of Land Management for a total of \$40,000. We are very optimistic about being included in the Challenge Grant program and will receive final word late this month.

Why is a full-time

naturalist/manager essential for the Natural Area next spring? There are two critical reasons: better protection of the tortoise population, and enhancement of visitor enjoyment. As you already know, we have some serious problems with collecting of wild tortoises, release of unwanted captive tortoises, and vandalism. Visitors have released sick and injured captive desert tortoises, as well as some turtles and tortoises that don't belong in the desert! Tour guides and Bureau of Land Management employees have reported finding a Texas tortoise, a box turtle, several sick captive desert tortoises, and even a large captive with its cracked shell covered with fiberglass. The presence of a naturalist/manager on site 5 days a week between March and June and at other heavy visitor use periods could substantially reduce the incidence of such problems.

Visitor use has increased tremendously at the Natural Area in the last few years. Several thousand people are now coming to the Natural Area each spring. For example, in mid-week this spring, often 50 to 75 people visited the kiosk in a three-hour period. Visitors unfamiliar with deserts can quickly become disappointed if they do not see tortoises or other animals, not realizing that tortoises and many other desert animals have very limited activity periods above ground. The naturalist/manager could enhance visitor enjoyment by greeting visitors, leading tours, answering questions, showing brief slide programs in a visitor area at the motorhome, and selling tortoise T-shirts and other Committee products.

Please join the Committee in our new project to protect the desert tortoise and increase visitor enjoyment. A form for your special contribution is provided in the newsletter. The sooner we can establish a full-time presence at the Natural Area, the more quickly we will be able to stabalize and protect the tortoise population.

Kristin H. Berry

WATCH FOR YOUR WINTER ISSUE OF <u>TORTOISE TRACKS</u> IN EARLY DECEMBER MEET THE MEMBERS OF YOUR BOARD OF TRUSTEES



CAROL PANLAQUI Products Chair

Joining the Committee as a volunteer tour guide in the late 70's, Carol accepted the position of Products Chair in 1981.

Her fascination with the desert and its ecology and her dedication to the tortoise is a result of a stint as a biology teacher, which included teaching an introduction to natural history.

Born and raised in Idaho, "with her nose in a book", Carol brings to the Board of Trustees an intriguing resume, which includes -- in addition to teaching biology and chemistry - graduating with a degree in chemistry from the University of Washington in 1953, serving in the Women's Army Corps, working for 13 years as a chemist at the China Lake Naval Weapons Center, and spending 15 years working with the Maturango Museum in Ridgecrest, California. It was a decision to expand her horizons and to explore a life-long interest in archeology that led her to the museum. She served first as an archeological volunteer, then as Curator for seven years. During this time she also pursued an interest in anthropology at local colleges.

Carol met her husband, Clay, at the Naval Weapons Center, where he was employed as an engineer. They are parents of a daughter, Lynne. Carol and Clay retired in 1985 and now reside in Palm Springs. Carol keeps busy with her work for the Committee, doing volunteer work in archeology with the San Bernardino County Museum for their Calico Early Man Site, and serving as Natural Resources Chair and Vice-President of the Palm Springs Area League of Women Voters. Her interests also include gardening, weaving, and reading.

While enjoying so many activities, Carol has generously dedicated the time required to serve as Products Chair for the Committee. She is constantly looking for appealing items to expand our products brochure, and -- often accompanied by Clay -- has represented the Committee at many functions throughout Southern California.

LOOKING AHEAD TO THE DESERT TORTOISE NATURAL AREA SPRING TOUR SEASON

Quite possibly the irresistible lure of the desert could be the public's desire to understand how such a hostile environment can maintain such a delicate ecology.

The tour guides at the Desert Tortoise Natural Area (during the spring months) are anxious to explain the wonders and the life that abounds in this land where rain is rare and brief, where topsoil is practically nonexistent, and yet it is the richest biotic community in the western Mojave Desert.

Time allotted for a guided tour can pass ever so quickly because the appreciative folks who come to visit the Natural Area are inquisitive and anxious to experience and identify. Affability describes it best as visitor and guide decide 'How many legs does the insect have?', 'How old do you think that tortoise is?', 'Is that a badger or a kit fox den?', 'Was that a sage sparrow?', or 'How do you tell the difference between "yellow saucers" and "desert dandelions"?'

This last spring visitors to the Natural Area more than doubled. Next spring we look forward to guiding at least a dozen more tour groups at the Desert Tortoise Natural Area. That could mean 1,000 people will book tours (in groups of 10 or more) and will have tour guides assigned to help them appreciate this perfect habitat for wildlife; which is, in fact, considered to be the evolutionary birthplace of the desert tortoise.

In a word, the Desert Tortoise Preserve Committee wishes to augment the tour guide team, so that more visitors can be accommodated. WE ARE SEARCHING FOR MORE TOUR GUIDES. If any of our readers would like to learn to be a tour guide, and would dedicate 12 or 15 hours of Saturday time next spring, you are urged to contact Betty Forgey right away. Call her at (619) 762-6422 or write P.O. Box 307, Boron, California 93516.

THERE WILL BE A TOUR GUIDE TRAINING SESSION AT THE NATURAL AREA on Sunday, March 12, 1989. You will receive comprehensive training by Laura Stockton and Dr. Kristin Berry. Dr. Berry can help you explain

how such a hostile environment can maintain such a delicate ecology.

Betty Forgey



LIFELINE FUND REPORT

We can all celebrate the successful navigation through the state budget process of our grant from the California

Environmental License Plate Fund. As reported last spring, the \$100,000 grant will be used for acquisition of critical boundary parcels at the Desert Tortoise Natural Area.

It is also a pleasure to announce a \$7,500 grant from Chevron Corporation in support of the Committee's conservation programs. We hope to continue working with Chevron for desert conservation.

As in other spheres of life, the fundraising business occasionally delivers some hard knocks, and we received one recently. A major corporate grant for the Committee, in the final stage of approval, fell victim to a sudden corporate restructuring panic. However, our months of developing detailed proposals for land acquisition and public education projects have not been wasted. The projects are well designed and urgently needed, and several alternative funding sources are already being explored.

The Desert Tortoise Preserve Committee's Lifeline Fund campaign has started its second year with a new project, fund-raising for a full-time naturalist at the Natural Area for the spring of 1989. Please join with us in our expanded efforts to protect the tortoise population and increase public enjoyment of the Natural Area.

> Curtis Horton, Director The Desert Tortoise Preserve Committee's Lifeline Fund

NEW RESEARCH PROJECTS AT THE DESERT TORTOISE NATURAL AREA

In the last newsletter, I reported that several wild tortoises with a highly contagious, viral respiratory disease were discovered in the interior of the Desert Tortoise Natural Area in May, during a Bureau of Land Management survey of a permanent study plot. We suspect that the disease was introduced through illegal release of one or more sick tortoises. We estimate that from 8 to 25% of the tortoises are infected on and near the 1.1 square mile study plot. Both the Bureau of Land Management and California Department of Fish and Game have committed funds to gather background information and to study the disease. The California Department of Fish and Game committed \$10,000 from the California Rare and Endangered Species Enhancement Account for study of the respiratory virus. The funds are in the process of being transferred to the Bureau of Land Management and will be used to initiate a research program, hopefully in the fall of 1988. The funds will be used specifically to learn more about the disease pathology.

The Bureau of Land Management is in the process of initiating two projects, one with Dr. Ken Nagy of the University of California at Los Angeles, and a second with veterinarian Dr. Walter Rosskopf. The first project focuses on typical characteristics used to measure health in tortoises. Dr. Ken Nagy, a noted physiologist, and his two graduate students, Chuck Peterson and Brian Henen, collectively have several years of experience studying wild desert tortoises in California and Nevada. Chuck Peterson has a project underway comparing some physiological attributes of male tortoises at the Natural Area and in Ivanpah Valley. Brian Henen is working on energy flow in female tortoises near Goffs. Both Chuck and Brian will expand their projects and will gather data on length/weight relationships; characteristics of blood, urine, and mucous; and on typical parasite loads. They plan to collect samples from 30 healthy adult males and 30 adult females at the three locations approximately four times over a period of a year between late 1988 and late 1989. Such information on healthy tortoises is essential to interpreting and understanding similar data on diseased tortoises. Dr. Nagy, Chuck Peterson, and Brian Henen are donating their time, and the Bureau of Land Management is providing funds for radio transmitters and other equipment, travel costs, laboratory tests, and administrative fees.

The second Bureau-sponsored project will be with Dr. Walter Rosskopf, a veterinarian with considerable experience with desert tortoises. Dr. Rosskopf will work with Dr. Nagy and his students to interpret data from the wild tortoises. Dr. Rosskopf will also develop protocols for handling and treating the sick tortoises.

The Bureau of Land Management hopes to obtain additional funds in Fiscal Year 1989 (which begins October 1) for field surveys next spring to determine how far the disease has spread.

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

HOLIDAY GIFTS IDEAS

THINK TORTOISE while writing your holiday gift list! You can take some of the stress out of your shopping and support the Committee's efforts for the tortoise at the same time ... Our fundraising products are available by mail. A brochure illustrating a variety of items -- from stocking stuffers to lovely handmade ceramic windchimes -- is included in this issue of Tortoise Tracks for your convenience. Our elves are eagerly waiting to fill your orders and speed your packages on their way.





ROTION BACK

DESERT TORTOISE NATURAL AREA PIN NOW AVAILABLE



Just in time to be included in this newsletter ... Carol Panlaqui, our Products Chair, has announced that

Chair, has announced that a lovely enameled pin, 3/4" in diameter, is now available for \$3.00, plus tax, postage and handling. Its background color is white, with a gold band encirling a tortoise design in color.





RAVENS PREY HEAVILY ON JUVENILE TORTOISES IN THE CALIFORNIA DESERT

The Common Raven used to be a very rare bird in the deserts of California in the 1930's and 1940's. Eugene Cardiff, Natural History Curator for the San Bernardino County Museum, recently described how he had to look for two years to find one for the museum collection in the early 1940's. Now hundreds can be counted in brief visits to landfills, garbage dumps, and some desert water sources. Ravens also fly along paved roads looking for roadkills and can be seen perching or nesting on transmission line towers and telephone poles. Ravens are among the most intelligent of the birds and have learned to make use of man-made structures and refuse.

Ravens prey on small tortoises, ranging from hatchlings to juveniles 5 to 7 years of age (from about 1.75 to 4 inches in length). Until raven populations experienced explosive growth in the last few decades, their impacts on juvenile tortoises were probably minimal. The situation changed in the 1970's. Now ravens are having a serious impact on tortoises throughout the desert and are killing so many juvenile tortoises that recruitment of young tortoises into the adult population has virtually been brought to a standstill in many areas.

Raven predation on juveniles is particularly widespread in the western Mojave Desert. In 1978, Peter Woodman found a cluster of over two dozen tortoise shells near a raven nest on the Natural Area. In 1981 and 1982, Tom Campbell and Curt Uptain discovered remains of over 100 dead juveniles near fence posts on the Natural Area. Tom even observed a raven killing a small tortoise. In 1987, Steve Juarez and Peter Woodman found 185 carcasses of tortoises at a raven nest and perch near Kramer Junction. This spring Steve collected an additional 60 shells of freshly killed tiny juveniles at the same nest. Examples of excessive predation are not confined to the western Mojave Desert, however. Jim Farrell of the Bureau of Land Management's Needles Area Office began checking raven nests and perches in the eastern Mojave Desert this year. He quickly found several nest and perch sites with dozens of shells and observed a raven killing a small tortoise at a transmission line tower. Jim also has some circumstantial evidence that ravens may be attacking and killing adult tortoises.

What can be done about the rapidly growing raven populations and their impacts to tortoises? In August, representatives from several government agencies met in Riverside to discuss the problem and to work on potential solutions. The group recognized that:

- Growing raven populations are adversely affecting not only tortoises but other rare, threatened, and endangered species, such as the California Least Tern and the California Condor.
- Raven populations are expanding because of the readily available food sources (garbage, roadkills) and perch and nest sites on man-made structures.
- A Raven Management Plan should be developed to identify ways to reduce the rapid growth of raven populations and to lessen the impact of ravens on native animals.

Earlier this year, the California Department of Fish and Game provided the Bureau of Land Management with \$22,000 to conduct a survey of raven distribution and abundance in desert tortoise habitat and to assess the impacts of ravens on tortoises. The Bureau plans to award a contract for fall-winter raven surveys in September.

The subject of abnormally high raven predation on tortoises is of importance not only to government agencies, but also to the Desert Tortoise Preserve Committee. We will continue to keep you informed of what is happening.

DESERT TORTOISE COUNCIL ANNOUNCES PLANS FOR FOURTEENTH ANNUAL SYMPOSIUM



The Peppermill in Mesquite, Nevada, has been chosen as the site for the Desert Tortoise

Council's 14th Annual Symposium, to be held March 17th, 18th and 19th, 1989. A field trip will follow on the 20th.

Mark your calendars now and look for further details in your next newsletter.

NOTES FROM THE PRESIDENT

We have spent the summer in a monitoring and planning mode, it being too hot to do physical work in the desert. The Lifeline Fund is involved with exciting ideas and activities as Curtis Horton reports elsewhere. I am really excited about the possibility of a challenge grant from the BLM (Bureau of Land Management) to provide a Naturalist at the Natural Area in the spring. We have had many inputs from tortoise enthusiasts that more interpretation should be provided out there and we think this will help fill that need.

I was very happy for Patty McLean, the BLM Ridgecrest Area Manager, on the announcement of her new position as Assistant District Manager in Albuquerque, New Mexico. This is a career promotion for her and one well deserved. She has been a strong supporter of the desert tortoise in the wild and we will sorely miss her management expertise and guidance in the coming months and years. Thanks for your help, Patty, and good luck in your new position. Please keep in touch!

On some desert development project highlights -- last spring the Committee received \$25,000 compensation funds from Kerr McGee Corp. for their Searles Valley co-generation plant. The go ahead to spend them was contingent upon the start of plant construction and that has now happened. We have been looking at suitable parcels in the Natural Area for purchase. The Committee has also opened discussions with a representative for Westinghouse Corp. on compensation associated with their application to build a co-generation plant in Boron, California. More on this later.

The Committee is staying close to the BLM and CDFG (California Department of Fish and Game) progress in identifying the viral respiratory disease in some wild tortoise populations and the planning for a program to combat it. We are all concerned with this. It illustrates again how much we still need to learn about management of this species.

We have a fall work party scheduled at the Natural Area and our annual meeting is scheduled for January 21st in Bakersfield. Please put these on your calendar -- and I hope to see you there!

George Moncsko, President

ANNUAL MEETING SCHEDULED

YOU ARE INVITED to attend the Desert Tortoise Preserve Committee's Annual Meeting and Banquet slated for Saturday, January 21st at Hodel's Buffet in Bakersfield, California. The meeting will be held in the afternoon followed by a social hour and dinner in the evening. Details and reservation form will be included in your Winter issue of Tortoise Tracks.

NEW CTTC CHAPTER PROPOSED FOR HIGH DESERT

The Inland Empire Chapter of the California Turtle and Tortoise Club (CTTC) is planning to sponsor a new chapter to serve the area of Southern California known as the High Desert.

CTTC not only serves the needs of the captive tortoise -- through providing care information and operating an adoption program under the supervision of the California Department of Fish and Game -- but also is concerned about the plight of the wild desert tortoise, supporting such organizations as the Desert Tortoise Preserve Committee and the Desert Tortoise Council.

The need is great for more desert residents to become involved. Please pass the word along to folks in the High Desert. An organizational meeting is planned for mid-November. For further information call Connie Wheeler (714) 882-7076 or Tamara Dodson (619) 253-2233.



NORTHERN CALIFORNIA CONFERENCE ANNOUNCED

The Northern California Herpetological Society has issued a Call for Papers and an invitation to attend its fourth conference on Captive Propagation and Husbandry of Reptiles and Amphibians, to be held February 18 thru 20, 1989, at the University of California at Davis. Their program tentatively includes the presentation of papers on a wide spectrum of subjects, workshops, social gatherings and a banquet. For further information, contact Gerold Merker, Conference Chairman (916) 644-6253 or Ralph Gowen, Conference Program Committee (415) 222-6120.

DESERT TORTOISE SURVEY COMPLETED IN SPRING OF 1988 IN THE NATURAL AREA INTERIOR

The Bureau of Land Management has been monitoring the status of tortoise populations in the California deserts with period surveys of 15 study plots. Two of the 15 study plots are on the Desert Tortoise Natural Area one is in the interior and the other is centered on the visitor center.

The interior plot originally was part of a study plot I established in 1973, when I was working for Caltrans on a desert tortoise relocation project. In 1973 and 1974, over 100 tortoises were marked in the area. In 1979, the Bureau sponsored a 60-day spring survey, and followed up with additional surveys in 1982 and 1988.

This spring, Dr. Craig Knowles and Pam Knowles of FaunaWest, who have conducted similar tortoise surveys on Bureau study plots in Stoddard and Chemehuevi valleys, received a contract to conduct the surveys and started to work in early April. Carrying their baby in a backpack, the spent 60-person days on the plot over a period of about two months. They located and registered 162 tortoises, several of which were first marked in 1973 and 74. For example, tortoise No. 3, first discovered in a 5 foot deep mining pit in 1973, was recaptured again this year! He has been recaptured in 1974, 1978, 1979, and 1982 but has grown relatively little over the intervening years.

A preliminary evaluation of the data indicates that the densities have declined about 50% since 1979. Significant changes also have occurred in the size-class structure, with the frequency of adults increasing from 54% in 1979 to 82% in 1988. During the same 9-year interval, juvenile frequencies declined from 27 to 12%. The loss of juveniles is the result of excessive raven predation. Deaths from the viral respiratory disease have also played a role. The Bureau of Land Management and California Department of Fish and Game are responding to this new information on ravens and the disease with new study and action plans (see other articles, this issue).

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

LATE-BREAKING NEWS

As this newsletter goes to press, word has been received that Mary Trotter, Committee Treasurer for many years, has found it necessary to relinquish these duties. Mary has given outstanding service to the Committee, faithfully making the long journey to meetings from her home in San Diego. Until this past year, she also represented the Committee at the various California Turtle and Tortoise Club shows.

Current Products Chair, Carol Panlaqui the Board of Trustees member highlighted in this issue — has consented to assume the duties of Treasurer, so ...

HELP URGENTLY NEEDED

Person or Persons to Fill the Following Positions:

Products Chair

Duties include:	Stocking, storing and
	mailing Desert Tortoise
	Preserve Committee products.
Time required:	Averages about one hour
	per week per year.
Storage:	Currently about four dozen
	12" x 12" x 18" boxes.

A good "at home job"!

Product Sales at	Shows
Duties include:	Attend five shows (four in
	spring, two in fall) and
	sell DTPC products.
	Coordinate with Products
	Chair.
Time:	All day Sunday,
	plus preparation time
	and financial report.

An opportunity to meet interesting people!

Both of these jobs could, of course, be handled by one person. Please consider giving a bit of your time for the tortoise. You may call Carol (619) 327-7785 for further details.

CALENDAR

January 21, 1989

February 18 thru 20, 1989

March 17 thru 20, 1989

DESERT TORTOISE PRESERVE COMMITTEE ANNUAL MEETING AND BANQUET See information in this issue

NORTHERN CALIFORNIA HERPETOLOGICAL SOCIETY CONFERENCE ON THE CAPTIVE PROPAGATION AND HUSBANDRY OF REPTILES AND AMPHIBIANS See information in this issue

DESERT TORTOISE COUNCIL FOURTEENTH ANNUAL SYMPOSIUM The Peppermill, Mesquite, Nevada

Further information will be included in the Winter newsletter or contact: Desert Tortoise Council 5319 Cerritos Avenue Long Beach, CA 90805

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



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

EMERGENCY NATURALIST/MANAGER PROJECT

CONTRIBUTION FORM

Yes, I want to help put a full-time skilled manager on site at the Desert Tortoise Natural Area to protect the tortoise population and to enhance visitor enjoyment.

Please find enclosed my special contribution of \$_____ for the Emergency Naturalist/Manager Project. I understand that my contribution is tax-deductible.

Address		
nuuress		

City_____State____Zip____

(Please make check payable to the Desert Tortoise Preserve Committee, Inc. and mail to P.O. Box 453, Ridgecrest, CA 93555)



Thank you!

FUND RAISING FLYER	ORDER FORM	CAROL PANLAQUI (619) 327-7785 DESERT TORTOISE PRESERVE COMMITTEE, INC. P.O. BOX 453 RIDGECREST, CA 93555	T-SHIRTS	Quantity Children's (C) or Adults (A) Size Color Choice Price #1 Price Price Price Price		BEIUV	PAPER PRODUCTS	POSTER(S)	NOTE CARD(S), Tortoise NOTE CARD(S), Owi	POSTCARDS	POSTCARD, Tortoise & Desert Candle	POSTCARD, Burrowing Owls POSTCARD, Zehra-Tailed 1 izard	POSTCARD, Horned Lizard	POSTCARD, Mohave Ground Squirrel	POSICAHD, Pack Hat POSTCARD, Thistle Sage Flower	BORDERED POSTCARDS	POSTCARD, Tortoise	L		BIRDS DESIGN, Blue \$9,00	MISCELLANEOUS	PATCH \$2.85	BOLO \$235 PENDANT \$2.35	CREWEL \$ 800 (12" square with yarn, needle, instructions)	Total Amount	California Residents add 6% Sales Tax Add 20% for Dostana and Handlinn Fee	TOTAL AMOUNT ENCLOSED	7d	ADDRESS	CITY STATE ZIP
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DESERT TORTOISE PH	T-SHIRTS	radiation and and and and and and and and and an		BUTIGITTHER		AND	2 SCREENED DESIGNS			 "DESERT TORTOISE NATURAL AREA" In beige only, with multicolor design on front. 	CHILDREN'S SIZES.		1	A A A A A A A A A A A A A A A A A A A	MULTI-COLOR TORTOISE DESIGN	31/2 inch diameter	sew on patch	C87.74	MINDCHIMES	WINDUIMES	CERAMIC,	A A A A A A A A A A A A A A A A A A A		A A A SO AND		S.V.	ANCIAN		W B C B))