



Summer
2023
Edition 43:2

Tortoise Tracks

Newsletter



Desert Tortoise Research Natural Area

CELEBRATING 50 YEARS

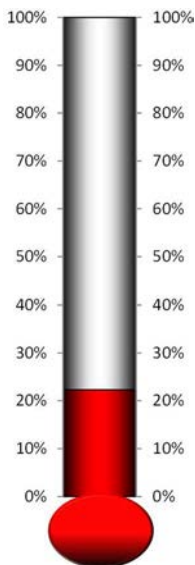


Above: Collage of photos taken March 25th, 2023 at DTRNA. All photos courtesy of Tom Astle of Tom Astle Photography. Collage compiled by Sharon Newkirk

DTPC’S Permanent Endowment Receives a Much Needed Boost Thanks to the 50TH Anniversary and Board Matching Campaign

In 2014, at the suggestion of Director Greg Lathrop, the Board established the Permanent Endowment (PE), initially with a generous contribution from Greg. The initial goal of \$3 million was established, our thinking being that even at a 4% interest rate, such an endowment would contribute roughly a third of our annual operating budget.

At the end of our first full year, our PE balance was \$43,946.04. Since then, with wonderful support from our members as well as non-member bequeaths, by December 31, 2022, our PE balance stood at \$585,627.92. As we approached the 50th Anniversary of the DTRNA, the board voted to establish a match offer, in which the first \$25,000 contributed to the PE from March 25th through the end of April would be matched dollar for dollar by donations made by our board members. Today, we are pleased to report that the new balance of the PE at May 31, 2023 stands at \$670,000.00, or some 22.3% of our goal.



Congratulations and our deepest appreciation to everyone who has donated thus far and thanks in advance to those of you who will hopefully add your contributions in the months and years ahead to help us attain that goal. Thanks ...

U.S. SENATOR DIANNE FEINSTEIN
CALIFORNIA



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United States Senate

March 25, 2023

Desert Tortoise Preserve Committee, Inc.
Post Office Box 940
Ridgecrest, CA 93556

Friends,

I'm sorry I couldn't be with you today to celebrate 50 years of the Desert Tortoise Research Natural Area.

As many of you know, protecting California's desert has been one of my top priorities since I was first elected to the Senate. Together, we have accomplished so much for this unique and wonderful area of California. From enacting the California Desert Protection Act in 1994 and expanding its protections in 2019, to establishing three national monuments in 2016: Mojave Trails, Sand to Snow, and Castle Mountains. I'm proud of our work to preserve the painted landscapes of our desert.

The Mojave Desert holds a special place in my heart as does the desert tortoise. I learned so much from advocates and scientists about these creatures and remember fondly when Elden Hughes brought tortoises to Washington D.C. to the amazement of everyone at the constituent breakfast he attended. Our efforts to save this iconic creature go hand in hand with preserving the Mojave Desert, its natural habitat. As you well know, desert tortoise populations have been decimated by habitat loss over recent decades. But with a lot of help from many in this room, we've protected nearly 9 million acres of desert and therefore critical habitat.

At the center of desert tortoise conservation efforts is the Desert Tortoise Research Natural Area. The work you have accomplished over the last 50 years has been central to saving the desert tortoise and I thank each of you for all you've done.

I wish I could be with you all celebrating the 50th anniversary of the DTRNA, but I hope everyone enjoys a special celebration today.

All the best,

Dianne Feinstein
United States Senator

DTPC Embarks on Brochure Updating Project

By Ron Berger, DTPC President

The recent 50th anniversary event at the DTRNA highlighted the impacts our wonderful volunteers and the great folks at BLM have done to improve the visitor experience: more trailers, improved signage, better graded roads, and, of course, the incredible new kiosk graphics. But for those of us on your DTPC Board, they also highlighted the areas where improvement is needed. Two obvious examples are our trail signage and our brochures. We, I'm happy to report, are working on both. With respect to the brochures, 50 years has seen our stack of brochures evolve to the current eight, each with different info, different graphics, different design, fonts, etc. So, high time to take the opportunity to do a total top to bottom redesign.

Our efforts in this regard would not have been possible without the recent donations we received from members. Thank you. They also could not have been possible without our volunteers:

1. Asbury & Co. stepped up pro bono and developed the beautiful 50th anniversary logo. And when I asked if they would assist with brochure design, they were only too happy to help. Asbury & Co. is a full-service advertising agency and design consultancy based in Eugene, Oregon. They emphasize high-quality creative matched with smart results-driven strategies. Their team includes some of the region's most respected experts in strategy, design, media, writing, and direction.
2. Tom Aistle of Tom Aistle Photography took a day, entirely on his time and at his expense, to come up to the DTRNA and to work his magic, producing the beautiful photos forever memorializing the glorious event. His photos adorn our front page of this issue, and have been featured in the recent issue of the Tortuga Gazette, the newsletter of the California Turtle and Tortoise Club (CTTC), and will soon be featured in the globally distributed publication, The Turtle, by the Turtle Conservancy. And, no sooner did he complete this project, then he volunteered to help us create a brochure featuring invertebrates in many families and groups, including the arachnids of the DTRNA.
3. Alexia Svejda works in the California City area with the Chamber of Commerce and on public relations. As we were trying to figure out how to get the word out about the 50th Anniversary Event, I reached out to Alexia as the superstar I know her to be, and sure enough, again entirely on her own time, she created the social media marketing of our event, and even got it all posted. As we started thinking about the brochure project, we again requested, and Alexia graciously provided, her expertise.

So, with incredible volunteer efforts such as these, here's a look at the first draft of the brochures in progress. It will be a big project, but I hope you will agree, well worth the effort.

The Desert Tortoise Preserve Committee

The Desert Tortoise Preserve Committee, Inc. was founded in 1974 to protect the desert tortoise by acquiring and protecting its habitat and educating the public. The area now has four to six times the densities of tortoises and much lower mortality rates than outside the fenced boundaries on private and public lands.

In 1979, the committee completed fencing around most of the perimeter. The hogwire fence was raised 10-12 inches off the ground to permit movement of wildlife. However, in recent years, the fence was extended to the ground in a few areas to protect tortoises from heavy vehicle use adjacent to the fence.

An Interpretive Center was built by the Bureau of Land Management at the entrance to the Natural Area, 5 miles from California City Boulevard on the Mojave-Randsburg Road. It includes a kiosk with descriptive panels, shelter and benches. Self-guiding nature trails are available. A naturalist is present during spring months for education and interpretation of flowers and wildlife.

The Committee also conducts guided tours for schools, museums and other groups in the spring, after the tortoises emerge from hibernation.



We need your help

Support our work by making a tax-deductible donation, becoming an active or contributing member. Membership includes our informative quarterly newsletter "Tortoise Tracks."

Membership levels

- Individual
- Family
- Sponsor
- Benefactor
- Patron
- Corporate Life

Please make checks payable to Desert Tortoise Preserve Committee and mail to:
Desert Tortoise Preserve Committee, Inc.
PO Box 940
Ridgecrest, CA 93556

Phone: 442-294-4258
Email: dtpc@tortoise-tracks.org



The Desert Tortoise: A species under threat

Within the desert's fragile ecosystem, tortoise populations are rapidly diminishing. In some places, they have disappeared completely. Losses are due to vandalism, raven predation, disease, collections for pets, and habitat degradation. Habitat has been lost or damaged from mining, livestock grazing, development of desert lands for cities, agriculture, roads and utility corridors, vehicle-oriented recreation, military uses, and renewable energy.

Tortoise populations grow slowly due to their low reproductive potential. Females do not breed until they are 15 to 20 years old. They lay small clutches of eggs when forage is poor and when the female is small and young. Hatching survival is low because juveniles are eaten by many predators such as coyotes, kit fox, ground squirrels and the Common Raven.



Location: The 39.5-square-mile area is in the western Mojave Desert near Fremont Valley and the western slopes of the Rand Mountains in southeastern Kern County. It is 5.5 miles northeast of California City, a two-hour drive north from Los Angeles, and one and a half-hour drive east from Bakersfield.

Visiting the Desert Tortoise Research Natural Area

When to visit: Wildlife is best observed in the spring months during cool morning hours. Some species are most abundant during years when there are carpets of wildflowers as a result of a wet winter.

What you might see: In addition to the threatened Desert Tortoise, the official California State Reptile. The State-listed threatened Mojave ground squirrel is present as well as jackrabbit, coyote, badger, desert woodrat, kangaroo rat, and the protected desert kit fox. Lizards include the collared lizard, side-blotched lizard, leopard lizard, chuckwalla, and the western whiptail. Birds include the cactus wren, LeConte's thrasher, ash-throated flycatcher, red-tailed hawk, and ladderback woodpecker. Snakes common to the area are coachwhip, gopher, sidewinder and Mojave rattlesnake. There are also more than 200 different types of plants and flowering shrubs, including desert candles, Mojave asters, primroses, blazing stars, coreopsis, lupines, phacelias, thistle sage, gilia, and creosote bush.

Do not release captive tortoises

It is illegal to release captive tortoises or relocate wild tortoises from other areas of the desert to the Natural Area. Captive tortoises are highly likely to carry infectious diseases. Also, pets may have different genetics that can negatively affect the wild population.



Ants

Black harvester ant (*Veromessor pergandei*) are all female. Winged ants called "alates" are both males and females that fly to start new colonies.



Bees and Wasps

Unlike non-native honeybees, most native bees are solitary, like this digger bee (tribe *Anthophorini*). Also keep an eye out for the tarantula hawk wasp (*Pepsis sp.*), a big but non-aggressive, orange-winged insect sometimes seen on creosote flowers.



Flies

Flies (order *Diptera*) are a diverse group. The long-beaked, fuzzy bee flies (family *Bombyliidae*) are parasitic on other insects.

We need your help

Since 1974, the work of the Desert Tortoise Preserve Committee (DTPC) has been supported through generous donations by individuals, organizations and government agencies. You can support our work with a tax-deductible donation or becoming a contributing member.

Online: tortoise-tracks.org
Phone: 442-294-4258

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**Desert Tortoise Research
Natural Area**
CELEBRATING 50 YEARS



This brochure was supported by, and produced in collaboration with, the Bureau of Land Management. For news about the BLM in California, subscribe to their weekly e-newsletter NewsBytes, or call the Ridgecrest office at (760) 384-5400 for more information.



Invertebrates



A metallic green blister beetle (*Lytta sp.*) and plant bug (*Aophaenus princeps*)

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**Desert Tortoise Research
Natural Area**

CELEBRATING 50 YEARS

A viewing guide

At the Desert Tortoise Research Natural Area, insects and arachnids are numerous. Like tortoises, they may be hard to find in extreme weather. But in spring when flowers are plentiful, they appear in great numbers and diversity. Here's a viewing guide.



Beetles

Beetles (order *Coleoptera*) are familiar for their hard outer wings called "elytra." The family of Darkling Beetles includes "stink bugs" (*Eleodes sp.*) that can indeed emit a foul-smelling chemical if disturbed. If attacked, Blister beetles (like the green beetle on the cover) can exude a toxin that blisters skin. An unusual blister beetle is the inflated beetle or spider beetle (*Cystodemus armatus*) which often develops a white waxy coating.



Butterflies and moths

The order *Lepidoptera* includes the western pygmy blue (*Brephidium exilis*), the smallest butterfly in North America with a mere 12-20 mm. wingspan. Also look for the large white-lined sphinx moth (*Hyles lineata*), which can often be seen drinking nectar from flowers like a hummingbird. Its variably-hued caterpillars are food for migrating birds.



Grasshoppers

Grasshoppers (order *Orthoptera*) are abundant but hard to spot until they jump.

Arachnids

Unlike insects, which have 3 body segments and 6 legs, arachnids have 2 body segments and 8 legs. Not all spiders make a web. Some, like this jumping spider (*Phidippus nikites*), hunt and pounce on prey.



This is the home of a burrowing wolf spider (*Geolycosa gosoga*). They build a raised turret out of sand and plant material and bind it with silk. They are nocturnal hunters.



See more online

This is just a sampling of the many insects and arachnids you'll see at the Desert Tortoise Research Natural Area. To view more, visit tortoise-tracks.org

DTPC, USFWS Continue Multi-Year Efforts to Reduce Ravens at DTRNA

We all recognize that there are many more common ravens within the California deserts today as there were 50 years ago. Meanwhile, in many areas, the desert tortoise populations have declined by 90%.

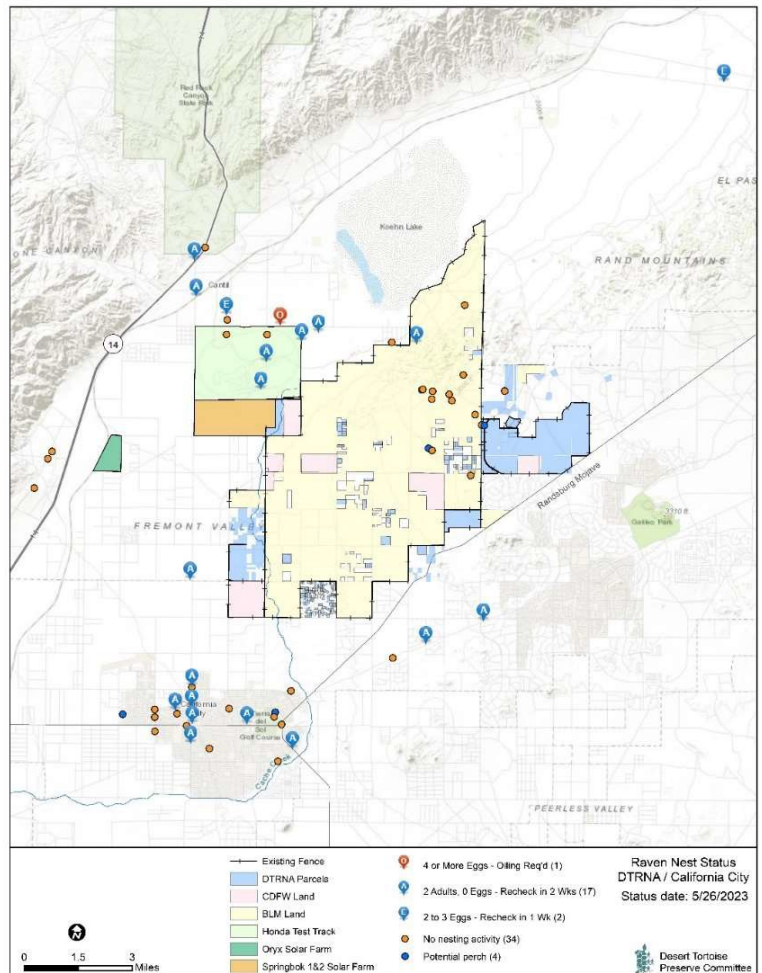
It's not a coincidence. Ravens are attacking and killing all sizes of tortoises, and particularly juvenile tortoises. After many years in which literally hundreds of well-intentioned professionals worked on but could not arrive at a politically acceptable solution, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) proposed oiling raven eggs in their nests with the non-toxic methyl anthranilate, made from grape skins. They were convinced that the raven eggs deprived of oxygen due to the oiling would not hatch, effectively reducing raven populations.

Meanwhile, Steve Fettig, an avian expert at USFWS speculated that ravens were so intelligent that, if eggs in a given area did not hatch, ravens would simply relocate to other areas. Your DTPC committed to marshal a group of volunteers to identify active raven nests with eggs and relay the 'addresses' of those nests to USFWS. They, in turn, offered to fund the oiling. Oiling began in the West Mojave in 2016.

USFWS reports that raven densities have declined in 5 of the 6 areas they studied over the past three years. Anecdotally, we believe that might be the case at and around the DTRNA. There is conjecture that while the ravens don't know why eggs in the treated areas are not hatching, they may have, in fact, moved on to nest elsewhere. So, while other factors including the recent (2021-2022) drought likely have played a role in the active raven nest reduction, these initial observations are exciting. Oiling continues, and a key killer of desert tortoises in critical tortoise habitat may finally be in retreat.



A camera and mirror on a long pole looking down into an active raven nest shows eggs which will be oiled



The Spring 2023 raven 'address book' provided by the DTPC volunteers to USFWS for oiling.

Volunteer Opportunities:

Please email DTPC@Tortoise-tracks.org or call (442)294-4258 to help us manage the DTRNA and desert tortoise habitat.

Fall Work Party October 14th:

Our Fall Work Party will take place on Saturday, October 14th, 2023. Please call or email DTPC@Tortoise-tracks.org to volunteer. Thank you! ♣

Steve & Marlene Ishii Raptor Pics

Long-time DTPC members and both tortoise and raptor whisperers Steve and Marlene generously agreed to share some of their most recent raptor photos with us. Enjoy! Thanks, Steve & Marlene.



Above: Adult prairie falcon (Lockhart, CA)



Above: Fledgling prairie falcon (California City, CA)



Above: Adult prairie falcon dropping off a gravid leopard lizard to fledglings (California City, CA)



Above: Adult peregrine falcon carrying a mourning dove (San Pedro, CA)



Above: Burrowing owls (Ontario, CA)



Above: Northern harrier foraging (Bosque del Apache, NM)



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

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Preserve Manager & Conservation Coordinator

Telephone: (442) 294-4258 Email: dtpc@tortoise-tracks.org
www.tortoise-tracks.org

Tortoise Tracks is published four times a year.

More Steve & Marlene Ishii Raptor Pics



Above: Adult male American kestrel with a vole (Farmington, UT)



Above: Adult bald eagle (Piedmont, WY)



Above: Snowy owl (Cypress, CA)



Above: Crested caracara (Sells, AZ)



Above: Harris hawk (Willcox, AZ)



Above: Sub-adult ferruginous hawk (Beryl Junction, UT)

Other Happenings at DTRNA

Bumble Bee Atlas Survey – was conducted by the Xerces Society for Invertebrate Conservation on sections of the DTRNA in May and June.

Mohave Ground Squirrel Studies – have been proposed by the Mohave Ground Squirrel Conservation Council (MGSCC) with support from the Wildlife Conservation Board. If funding is secured, this research will be overseen by Dr. Todd Esque, and is endorsed by DTPC.



March 25, 2023 | California City, California

With Gratitude for 5 Decades of Partnership and Support



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SUPPORTER



CONTRIBUTORS

Tom Astle, Photographer | Alexia S Vejda, Social Media | Lisa LaVelle, Naturalist | Freya Reder, Naturalist | Caroline Champlin, Naturalist | Liam Connolly, Preserve Manager & Conservation Coordinator | Jun Y Lee, Interim Executive Director & Director of Land Acquisition



2000s: The Discovery Years



	PUBLIC SUPPORT
2000	25th Anniversary of DTPC celebrated
2003	BLM awards DTPC as Conservation Partner of the Year
	BLM TAKES ACTION
2003	BLM continues Interim Mineral Withdrawal for the DTRNA
2000+	BLM continues co-funding DTRNA Naturalist
	HABITAT ACQUISITION
2001	DTPC collaborates with California Department of Transportation for 1,820 acre acquisition
2002	DTPC acquires 2,000 acres within DTRNA and DTRNA Eastern Expansion Buffer Zone
2003	DTPC acquires 519 acres within DTRNA Eastern Expansion Buffer Zone
2004	Center for Biological Diversity donates Camp C to DTPC in Eastern Expansion Buffer Zone
	STEWARDSHIP ACTIONS
2002	DTPC awarded National Fish and Wildlife Foundation grant for restoration
2004	DTPC awarded multi-year restoration grant by National Resource Conservation Service for Camp C habitat restoration
2007	DTPC completes 3 major fencing projects totaling 3.3 linear miles
2009	DTPC receives OHV Green Sticker grant for signage and fencing in DTRNA Expansion Areas
	ENVIRONMENTAL OUTREACH
2000	Mojave Desert Discovery Centers installed in Barstow California Welcome Center, Joshua Tree National Park, and BLM Red Rock Canyon, Nevada Visitor Center



2010s: The Reflection Years



Desert Tortoise Recovery

Sharing our Knowledge and Experiences & Creating Communities

- Land acquisition
- Fencing
- Removing grazing, mining
- Reducing vehicle mortalities
- Restoration
- Education
- Research





Tortoise Tracks

THE DESERT TORTOISE PRESERVE COMMITTEE
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RIDGECREST, CALIFORNIA 93556

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If you would prefer to receive an electronic copy, notify us
by email at dtpc@tortoise-tracks.org

DTPC MEMBERSHIP/CONTRIBUTION FORM

- YES, I want to help save the threatened desert tortoise and its habitat! Here is my tax-deductible membership contribution of:

<input type="checkbox"/> \$40 Individual	<input type="checkbox"/> \$100 Sponsor	<input type="checkbox"/> \$400 Patron/Corporate
<input type="checkbox"/> \$75 Family	<input type="checkbox"/> \$200 Benefactor	<input type="checkbox"/> \$2000 Life and/or Corporate Membership
- 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: _____		
- I'd like to help you grow the DTPC Permanent Endowment. Please accept an additional donation of:

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

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

Let's grow the Permanent 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:

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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. Contributions and/or annual membership dues are tax-deductible, to the extent allowable by law. 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 *