

SPRING
2024
Edition 44:1



Tortoise Tracks

Newsletter

DTPC Annual Meeting

Our annual meeting took place on February 3, 2024, and included presentations from DTPC President Ron Berger; Acting Field Manager of BLM's Ridgecrest Field Office, Tom Bickauskas; and DTPC Executive Director and Director of Land Acquisition, Jun Lee. Featured guest speaker, Dr. Melissa Merrick, PhD presented the keynote talk: ***Bigger, smarter, better understood – head start insights and new directions in Mojave Desert Tortoise research at the San Diego Zoo Wildlife Alliance***. Check out the Zoom recording of the full meeting on the DTPC's new website! <https://tortoise-tracks.org/2024-annual-dtpc-membership-meeting/>.

Dr. Merrick presented an overview of the San Diego Zoo Wildlife Alliance's Desert Tortoise Recovery Program, including a new collaborative head start partnership with The Living Desert Zoo and Gardens to raise larger, less vulnerable juveniles prior to release to the wild. As part of this head start program, the team has a unique opportunity to fill knowledge gaps about the less studied juvenile age class: from personality and anti-predator trainability to thermal ecology and the role of careful release site selection to mitigate predation risks. The team is also studying the influence of adult female nest placement on hatch success and offspring sex ratios, and the capacity of burrows to buffer against temperature extremes in a changing world. The Alliance is evaluating:

- ☐ Head starting in managed care facilities at the Living Desert and releasing tortoises after they grow to >100 mm MCL and 1-2 years in managed care and releasing smaller tortoises in optimal release sites;
- ☐ Anti-predator training to evaluate simulated exposure to mock raven interactions; and
- ☐ Use of burrows and microhabitat in different climate models, burrow thermal buffering, female nest decisions and nest outcomes.

San Diego Zoo Wildlife Alliance team members include Ron Swaisgood, PhD – Director of recovery ecology, Talisin Hammond, PhD – Scientist, Tom Radzio, PhD – Researcher, Daniel Essary – Research Associate II, Reed Newman – Research Associate I and Katelyn Rock – Research Associate I

Melissa Merrick, PhD Melissa is an associate director of recovery ecology at the San Diego Zoo Wildlife Alliance, where she helps to oversee the burrowing owl and desert tortoise recovery programs. Both programs are actively involved in conservation breeding and translocation to augment declining populations, while learning as much as possible about how behavior, physiology, and habitat influence outcomes. Prior to joining the Alliance, Melissa worked as a research scientist at the University of Arizona's School of Natural Resources and the Environment, where she led and supported research on southwest and international species of conservation concern.



2023 ACCOMPLISHMENTS REPORTED AT OUR ANNUAL MEETING



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

Roger Dale President
Laura Stockton Treasurer
Rachel Woodard Secretary
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Larry Nelson
Ron Berger

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Veranda Kuhar
Project Manager

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

Tortoise Tracks is published four times a year.

2023 Land Acquisition Results

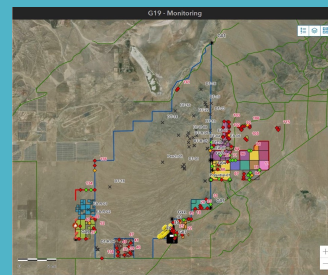
Agency	Location	Acres	Purpose
CALTRANS	Ivanpah, Mojave National Preserve, San Bernardino County	20	Mitigation Agreement for Caltrans OK310 Project
R&L Capital	Inyokern, Kern County	333	Mitigation Agreement for RB Solar Project
R&L Capital	Inyokern, Kern County	100	Donation
SoCalGas	Chuckwalla DWMA, Riverside County	200	Mitigation Agreement for North-South Interconnect Pipeline Project
	TOTAL	653	

G-19 OHV GRANT

California State Parks

DTRNA and Expansion Area
Restoration Areas – Project Areas
and Hotspots

- * Conducted sign inventory and replacements
- * Installed vertical mulching
- * Repaired damaged fencing



Spring Work Party

March 18 2023

Special Thanks to:

Mahmood Mokhayesh
Milena Mokhayesh
Mr & Mrs Vincent LeVeque
Karen Jetchak
Drew Johnson
LaReina Van Sant
Laura Stockton
Roger Dale
Jun Lee
BLM Ridgecrest Team

Accomplishments:

- * DTRNA Entrance Sign Installations
- * Trail maintenance
- * Naturalist and Interpretive Trailer set up



Fall Work Party

October 14 2023

20 Volunteers contributed to 3 events at the DTRNA

BLM's National Public Lands Day
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Services Desert Tortoise
Week 2023 DTPC annual Fall work party.

Accomplishments:

Sign repair and replacement along ENTIRE
Northern and Southern Perimeter fence of
DTRNA



DTPC 2023 AWARDS

The following individuals were recognized for their tremendous contributions in 2023:

LaReina Van Sandt served with distinction as a Wildlife Biologist with Bureau of Land Management's Ridgecrest Field office. Her enthusiasm for hands-on conservation work shown through recently when she led BLM and DTPC crews in mending fences and signs along the entire northern perimeter fence of the DTRNA during the combined BLM National Public Lands Day and DTPC 2023 Fall Work Party.

Tom Bickauskas recently received a well-deserved promotion as Acting Field Manager of the BLM Ridgecrest Field Office. Throughout his tenure Tom has been a stalwart supporter of the unique BLM – DTPC collaboration and has consistently explored ways to expand our public-private partnership.

Recently retired **Carl Symons** served as Field Manager of the Bureau of Land Management's Ridgecrest Field office for a number of years during which time the BLM – DTPC collaborative efforts flourished. Carl was instrumental in facilitating access and volunteers in support of the DTPC's Raven Nest Monitoring and Egg Oiling project at the DTRNA.

Alexia Svejda has been a resident of California City area, a fan of the DTRNA and a member/supporter of the Cal City Chamber of Commerce for a number of years. Alexia had committed countless hours in promoting the DTPC's programs throughout the years through social media including marketing the 50th Anniversary celebration for the Desert Tortoise Research Natural Area, Spring and Fall work parties at the preserve, and the 2023 National Public Lands Day events at the DTRNA. She is also a valued volunteer resource each year for the DTPC's Raven Nest Monitoring and Egg Oiling project.

Tom Astle generously devoted his considerable time and expertise as the official photographer during the 50th Anniversary celebration for the Desert Tortoise Research Natural Area. An avid citizen scientist, he collaborated with Alexia Svejda in creating the first ever brochure on Insects and Arachnids at the DTRNA. We are excited that Tom will conduct a macro photography workshop and lead a discussion about the insects and invertebrates at the upcoming Special Tours and Workshops event at the DTRNA on April 6th this year.

... MORE ACCOMPLISHMENTS IN 2023

Spring 2023 Raven Nest Oiling Results

119 total nests and/or perch locations visually checked
46 eggs oiled in 9 nests in California City
2 eggs oiled west of Randsburg Mojave Road
6 eggs oiled within DTRNA
New for 2023
Expanded activities to American Honda Test Track ; and
Solar project sites



Special Thanks !

USFWS for funding Hardshell Labs oiling efforts

DTPC's leads:

Caroline Champlin
Rachel Woodard for training and coordination
Steve Ishii for mapping and data support
Tim Shields, Hardshell Labs

Field Monitors:

Bob McCowan
Tiana McCowan
Alexia Svejda
Vincent LeVeque
Dan Burnett
Rachel Woodard

Collaborators:

BLM Ridgecrest Field Office
American Honda Corporation



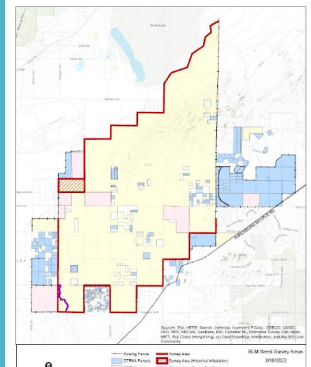
Spring 2023 Weed Monitoring & Abatement

March – June 2023

Funded by BLM Ridgecrest Field Office

Achievements:

* Re-surveyed 2022 hotspots
* Identified concentrations of invasives within 2022 / 2023 hotspots



Spring Naturalist Program

March 19 to June 4 2023
Funded by BLM Grant

Freya Reder, Full-time Naturalist
Caroline Champlin Part-time Naturalist

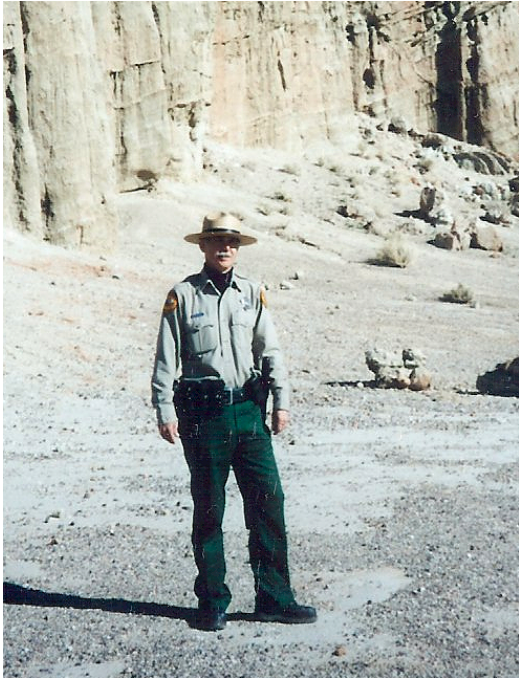
Accomplishments:

* 330 visitor groups
* 716 individuals
* 25% of visitors reported tortoise sightings
* 7 recorded sightings by Naturalists including 4 hatchling and 1 sub-adult
* 80% Californians, 20% out-of-state

Special thanks to the BLM Ridgecrest Field Office



Red Rock Canyon Ranger Mark Faull Honored



Mark Faull received the 2022 Golden Bear Award at the September Quarterly Meeting of the California Dept of Parks and Recreation for his outstanding contributions to the State Park System and programs. Then in October he was recognized at an appreciation luncheon by the Red Rock Canyon Interpretive Association (RRCIA) for his “many contributions to and lasting legacy at Red Rock Canyon State Park.”

From the time Mark arrived at Red Rock Canyon he has conducted in depth research into the rich natural and cultural history of the park and desert. A number of scientific publications document much of this work. Mark made critical contributions to the Red Rock Canyon State Park boundary expansion in the 1994 Desert Protection Act. He continues to collaborate with organizations and institutions in archaeology, paleontology, and botany in addition to other fields. Mark developed and maintains a close working relationship with the Natural History Museum of Los Angeles, facilitating palaeontologic field work.

Mark began his State Parks career at Humboldt Redwoods State Park. After working as a ranger in several Northern CA State Parks, he and his wife Marsha came to Red Rock Canyon State Park in 1984. He worked for 20 years at Red Rock Canyon as Park Ranger and later Associate Resource Ecologist.

Special Thanks to Ron Berger

We grew significantly with Ron’s leadership during his 11-year tenure as President of the Committee. He was – and continues to be – a driving force in advocating for expansion of the DTRNA, broadening our outreach through social media and marketing, strengthening our collaboration with a diverse range of public and private sector partners, expanding our funding base, and streamlining our governance and activities. Ron recently stepped down as President but continues to serve on the Board. He is succeeded by Roger Dale who served as President in the past.

Dr. Phil Leitner Lifetime Achievement

On October 25, 2023, Dr. Phil Leitner was honored by the newly formed Mohave Ground Squirrel Conservation Council for his pioneering research on Mohave ground squirrels at a dinner banquet hosted by The Maturango Museum in Ridgecrest.

Throughout the banquet several speakers made moving testimonials about the impact that Dr. Leitner had on their careers and the scientific community. Presenters included Ed LaRue, Kathy Simon, Leo Simone, Scott Osborn/CDFW, Tom Bickauskas/BLM, Todd Esque and Sharon Poessel/USGS, John Harris, Phil Scarry, Erica Orcutt, Pat Brown-Berry, his wife Barbara Leitner, and Jun Lee/DTPC.

“It was an honor to share in the celebration of someone who is synonymous with a special species in the way that we think of Jane Goodall and chimpanzees, Dr. Kristin Berry and desert tortoises, and Dr. Phil Leitner for his impactful work in support of Mohave ground squirrels,” Jun Lee said.



Ed LaRue presenting the Council’s award to Dr. Leitner

Remembering Carol and Clay Panlaqui

Longtime supporters of the DTPC, Carol and Clay Panlaqui, passed away within a few days of each other in November 2023, aged 92 and 94. They lived in Ridgecrest, CA for over 30 years and were integral members of the community.

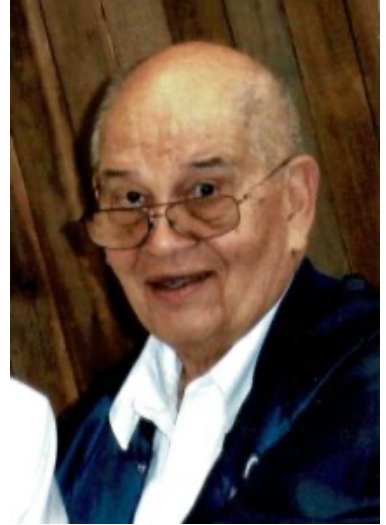
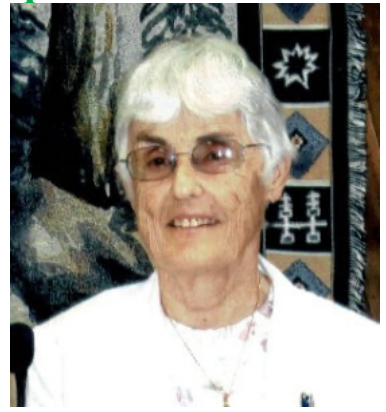
Carol joined the DTPC as a volunteer tour guide in the late 1970's and accepted the position of Products Chair in 1981. She later served as a Board member and Treasurer until relocating to her home state of Idaho in 1994.

After graduating with a degree in chemistry from the University of Washington in 1953, she had an interesting and varied career that included teaching biology and chemistry, serving in the Women's Army Corps, and working for 13 years as chemist at China Lake Naval Weapons Center.

Soon after coming to work at China Lake in the 1950s, she became involved with the fledgling Maturango Museum. It was a decision to expand her horizons and explore a lifelong interest in archaeology that led her to the Museum. She served first as an archaeological volunteer, then as Curator for seven years. During this time she also pursued her interest in anthropology at local colleges. She was involved with various archeological research projects, publishing several scholarly papers, and was active in environmental protection efforts across the northern and western Mojave Desert.

She received numerous awards from the City of Ridgecrest, the Maturango Museum, and the Desert Tortoise Preserve Committee for her work and commitment to helping communities and the environment.

Carol met her husband, Clay, at the Naval Weapons Center, where he was employed as an engineer. Although not a DTPC Board member, Clay actively supported Carol's work with the Preserve Committee, including helping with our early IT needs and also driving the Desert Tortoise Discovery Center – a donated motorhome which for years served as the home base for our springtime naturalist and was used at other times of the year for educational outreach throughout southern California.



Guy McNerny November 26, 1938 - April 12, 2023

Guy McNerny, our dedicated member and donor, passed on April 12, 2023. Over many years he was actively involved in the DTPC's stewardship programs and even donated a vehicle.

"He was thoughtful donor. He truly loved animals," remarked Dr. Kristin Berry.

Guy had friends across many communities including horses, tortoises, animal rescue, hiking, climbing, trains, and ham radio.

He passed peacefully at home surrounded by his beloved animals and caregiver Mary.





Special Celebration of Desert Tortoise Preserve Committee's 50th anniversary – April 6, 2024

We are excited to invite all members and supporters to a full morning of special activities at the Desert Tortoise Research Natural Area (DTRNA) on April 6, 2024 to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the Desert Tortoise Preserve Committee (DTPC). Please see the list of activity choices below.

All activities are free, but we request that you register using the attached form by Friday, March 29.

DTPC 50TH ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION

Saturday, April 6, 2024

Desert Tortoise Research Natural Area (DTRNA)

Your choices of activities include:

Macro Photography Workshop (talk from 8:00 a.m. to about 9:00 a.m. / instructor will be available for questions and trail time until 11:30 a.m.)

Volunteer Work Party (9:00 a.m. – 11:30 a.m.)

Naturalist-led tours of the DTRNA nature trails (available starting at 9:00 a.m.)

Driving tour to northeast DTRNA (view of Koehn Dry Lake) (time TBD based on RSVP's)

Complimentary Picnic Lunch (11:30 a.m.)

If you plan to join us for lunch, please bring your own folding chair as onsite seating is limited.

FEATURED ACTIVITY: Free Workshop on Macro Photography – Presented by Internationally Renowned Nature Photographer Tom Astle

Do you wish you could take better closeups of the beautiful blooms and interesting insects you see in the great outdoors? The DTPC's 50th anniversary celebration on Saturday, April 6 will include a hands-on macro photography workshop with nature photographer Tom Astle, starting at 8:00 a.m. at the DTRNA. The workshop will begin with a short talk, including tips on lighting, exposure, and composition. Tom will also have a variety of equipment on hand to demonstrate some of the many options available to get great results no matter your budget. The talk and equipment demo will be followed by time on the trails, looking for photo subjects. Tom will be available all morning to answer questions and offer advice. The workshop is open to all ages and experience levels, from smartphone users to people with DSLR or mirrorless cameras. Tom will provide everyone with a printed list of resources (including a link to a shared Google Doc) that they can access after the workshop.



DESERT TORTOISE PRESERVE COMMITTEE, INC.
50TH ANNIVERSARY EVENTS ON APRIL 6, 2024
EVENT REGISTRATION FORM

<p>DTPC 50TH ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION</p> <p>APRIL 6, 2024</p>	<p><u>PLEASE CHECK EACH ACTIVITY YOU PLAN TO ATTEND:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Macro photography workshop (starts at 8:00 a.m.)○ Volunteer work party (9:00 a.m. – 11:30 a.m.)○ Naturalist-led walking tours (available starting at 9:00 a.m.)○ Driving tour to northeast DTRNA / Koehn Dry Lake (timing and transportation to be arranged based on number of RSVP's) – PLEASE LET US KNOW IF YOU HAVE A 4-WHEEL DRIVE VEHICLE AND WOULD BE WILLING TO DRIVE OTHERS○ Complimentary picnic lunch (11:30 a.m.) – PLEASE BRING YOUR OWN FOLDING CHAIR(S)!
<p>LOCATION:</p> <p>DESERT TORTOISE RESEARCH NATURAL AREA (DTRNA)</p>	<p><u>DRIVING INSTRUCTIONS:</u></p> <p>From CA-58 (California City Blvd exit): Take California City Blvd. North until you reach the first traffic light. Best Western will be on your left as you approach the light. Continue straight and travel 1.3 miles until you reach a fork in the road at the large gazebo. Turn left onto Randsburg-Mojave Rd. Follow this dirt road for approximately 4 miles until you reach the entrance to the Desert Tortoise Research Natural Area.</p> <p>From California City proper: Take California City Blvd. East until you reach the edge of the golf course. Best Western will be on your right as you approach the light. Turn left and travel 1.3 miles until you reach a fork in the road at the large gazebo. Turn left onto Randsburg-Mojave Rd. Follow this dirt road for about 4 miles until you reach the entrance of the Desert Tortoise Research Natural Area.</p>

Name: _____
Address: _____
City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____
Email Address: _____
Telephone: _____

The DTPC is an IRS 501(c)(3) tax-exempt organization. Contributions may be tax-deductible to the extent allowed law.

MAIL REGISTRATION TO: DTPC – P.O. Box 940, Ridgecrest, CA 93556, or
EMAIL REGISTRATION TO: DTPC@TORTOISE-TRACKS.ORG, or
TEXT REGISTRATION TO: (714) 609-5845



Tortoise Tracks

THE DESERT TORTOISE PRESERVE
COMMITTEE PO BOX 940
RIDGECREST, CALIFORNIA 93556

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Thank you for being a member!



If you would prefer to receive an electronic copy, notify us by email at dtpc@tortoise-tracks.org. **Please indicate electronic copy ONLY or BOTH electronic and paper copies**

www.Facebook.com/DTPC.inc

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"/> \$40 Individual | <input type="checkbox"/> \$100 Sponsor | <input type="checkbox"/> \$400 Patron |
| <input type="checkbox"/> \$75 Family | <input type="checkbox"/> \$200 Benefactor | <input type="checkbox"/> \$2000 Life/Corporate |

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 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 \$ _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 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!

- | | |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> I would like my contribution to remain anonymous | <input type="checkbox"/> I would like to receive <i>Tortoise Tracks</i> 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
PO Box 940
Ridgecrest, CA 93556

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 *