

# Tortoise Tracks

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The Desert Tortoise Preserve Committee, Inc.

Fall 1997, 17:2

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## NATURALIST PROGRAM REPORT

This was the ninth consecutive year in which the DTPC had a naturalist on site at the Desert Tortoise Natural Area. In keeping with our goal of education as a means of protecting the desert tortoise, the Committee contracted with *On-Track Consulting and Research* again this year to provide naturalist services during those months when tortoises are most active and visitation at the Natural Area is greatest.

From 8 March through 25 May, Ken Holmes, Glenn Goodlett, Tracy Goodlett, Kemp Anderson, Danette Clinton, and Rob Heirele served as naturalists. During this time 327 groups totaling 1,124 individuals were recorded at the interpretive center. Five groups (159 individuals) arrived for prearranged tours. Off-highway vehicle users stayed for shorter periods of time than non-users. Most visitors (87%) were from California. There were visitors from eight additional states and four foreign countries. Of 171 respondents to a visitor survey, most (65.5%) were first-time visitors. The most common ways that visitors learned about the DTNA included books/guides, road signs, and word of mouth. The DTNA was the sole destination for 30.4% of its visitors. The most frequently visited attraction that was a part of the outing to the DTNA was Red Rock Canyon State Park. Many visitors inquired about adoption or care of their pet tortoises. The most commonly asked question concerning the tortoises was "How many tortoises are there?" Many visitors were curious about the size of the DTNA, its history, what agencies were involved and their functions, and how the lack of rain and annuals would affect the tortoise population this year. Most visitors read some of the displays at the Discovery Center and the interpretive kiosk, and all were interested in seeing tortoises. Fifty-eight visitor groups (17.7%) saw at least one tortoise, and of the 269 visitor groups that did not see a tortoise the most common reaction was that they would come back another day at a better time to try again. No attempts to collect wild tortoises in the interpretive center area were witnessed, although there were a few inquiries about release of wild tortoises into DTNA. There was one attempt to release a captive tortoise which was intercepted.

## A MESSAGE FROM THE BOARD PRESIDENT

I want to take this opportunity to let you know about some new and exciting things that are happening in your Desert Tortoise Preserve Committee. We will be establishing an office in

Riverside by the end of the year. Our goal will be to have it open approximately half time and staffed with two part time personnel. This permanent office will provide the Committee with:

- a central location for project and archival files
- improved liaison with project partners
- public accessibility to the DTPC
- a place for the Board of Trustee's meetings
- and office space for two part time staff.

Of the two staff, one individual will be an accounting type who will be supporting our treasurer, Roger Dale, in keeping the books of accounts in order and preparing financial reports at the end of each month. As many of you may not be aware, Roger's business is occupying an increasing amount of time and he needs the bookkeeping support this person will provide. The second individual will be responsible for some of the duties previously performed by Jun Lee who, after the first of the year, will be decreasing his consulting activities as Executive Director of the DTPC. This additional individual will have management responsibilities pertaining to the major programs of the DTPC including coordinating volunteers, designing and implementing public education programs, providing support services for agencies' nature preserves, and coordination with Jun Lee in the major fund raising efforts and land acquisitions. In addition this person will be responsible for setting up and overseeing the Riverside office.

I look forward to seeing you at the annual meeting and banquet in Victorville in January.

**Bob Brooks**

Editor's notes: Watch for the date, location and reservations information for the *Annual Meeting and Banquet* in the winter (December) edition of Tortoise Tracks.

## **VOLUNTEERS NEEDED FOR FALL DTNA WORK PARTY**

The fall maintenance work party at the Desert Tortoise Natural Area will be held on the weekend of November 8 and 9. Fence repair, sign replacement and trash removal are some of the ongoing necessary tasks that will be tackled. Several members of the Desert Survivors and a few students from the California City Middle School may participate.

Please join our volunteer crew for one or both days for good company and rewarding work in the beautiful Mojave Desert near California City.

For more information or to RSVP contact: Laura Stockton at 805-831-2325 or at [lstockton@lightspeed.net](mailto:lstockton@lightspeed.net)

## **BOARD OF TRUSTEES UPDATES**

***Ed LaRue Resigns*** - Ed LaRue, Recording Secretary for the Desert Tortoise Preserve Committee, resigned after three full years of service to devote more time to his consulting business, Circle Mountain Consultants, located in Wrightwood, California and to have more time for leisure and to spend with his family.

In 1994 we asked Ed to join the Board as the Recording Secretary, in part because of his fabulous record keeping and comprehensive meeting notes. He accepted and was in regular attendance at meetings with his notebook computer. We have never had more detailed records of activities at the Board of Trustees and Business meetings, especially important when so many different major projects (for example Harper Lake Road and Pilot Knob) were underway. Beyond recording the minutes of meetings, Ed was active on the Harper Lake Road Project, monitoring progress and reviewing products from contractors. He brought two new participants to the Board meetings, Mark Hagan and Wanda Deal. Mark Hagan subsequently became a member of the Board of Trustees and Wanda has helped with the Harper Lake Road fencing contract. Ed assisted with coordination with Edwards Air Force Base on printing Dr. Joan Schneider's booklet and has represented the Committee at several government meetings.

He is currently acting on behalf of the Desert Tortoise Council and Desert Tortoise Preserve Committee at Bureau of Land Management meetings dealing with the route designation process, specifically the pilot study in the Ord Mountain area south of Barstow. He just completed a draft proposal for the Ord Mountain Pilot Study, which is now under review by both nonprofit groups as well as other contractors and biologists. The Ord Mountain Pilot Study involved substantial field time and report preparation equaling several weeks of work.

On behalf of the Desert Tortoise Council, Ed has set up a workshop each October to provide a two day training program on how to work with desert tortoises in the field, the latest in research findings, and requirements of federal and state agencies. Several Desert Tortoise Preserve Committee members have found the Workshop to be invaluable. Due to the press of business, Ed will be skipping a year and will not offer the Workshop in 1997.

Ed has given the Desert Tortoise Preserve Committee the gift of many weeks, if not months, of service during the last three years and we are most appreciative. Thank you and our best wishes to you and your family, Ed!

***Jim Anderson Joins the Board*** - James Anderson became a member of the DTPC Board of Trustees on May 31. He previously assisted the Board in the preparation and negotiation of agreements for the construction of the fence along Harper Lake Road. Jim participated in the evaluation of proposals and interviews with potential contractors. His background as a public agency attorney was very helpful on the project.

Until his retirement in 1995, Jim was a partner in the law firm of Brunick, Alvarez and Battersby in San Bernardino. He primarily worked as general counsel to a number of water districts within San Bernardino, Riverside and Los Angeles Counties. Prior to re-entering active law practice, Jim was the Executive Officer for the Santa Ana Regional Board for thirteen years.

Jim was raised and educated in Sacramento. He received a biology degree, from California State University, Sacramento and worked for Sacramento County Health Department until 1969. Following graduation from University of the Pacific, McGeorge College of Law he worked for the Water Resources Control Board until his appointment to the Santa Ana Regional Board position. He has been active in a number of environmental issues, and is looking forward to his work with the DTPC Board.

***Letty Brooks becomes Recording Secretary*** - With the resignation of Ed LaRue, Letty volunteered to take on the Recording Secretary position effective September 14. Thanks, Letty!

***Mark Hagan Serves as DTPC liaison with BLM*** - Board Vice President Mark Hagan is serving as the liaison between the DTPC and the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), Ridgecrest Resource Area Office. Mark has been meeting with Mr. Lee Delaney on a regular basis. Recent discussions have focused on ways the Committee and the BLM can further the partnership which has been built up over the years and on promoting further BLM support of the DTNA.

The BLM has been very helpful in resolving grazing and water rights issues associated with the Pilot Knob allotment, a high priority for both Mark and the Committee. The BLM provided some funding for the DTNA Naturalist position in 1997, provided support for this past spring's desert tortoise monitoring study and has been busy repairing and installing fencing at the DTNA. Construction of new rest rooms at the DTNA is still being planned.

Discussions have also centered on a jointly developed package to solicit Land and Water Conservation Funds (LWCF) for habitat acquisition within the DTNA.

Mark has agreed to try and attend some of the BLM Executive Steering Committee meetings. These meetings allow for discussion on topics (i.e., grazing, mining, management plans and desert tortoise conservation) pertinent to the Ridgecrest Resource Area.

## **MOJAVE COGEN MITIGATION FUNDS ACQUIRE 38.4 ACRES WITHIN DTNA**

Recently the DTPC completed the purchase of 38.4 acres within the Desert Tortoise Natural Area. The land was acquired with mitigation funds from the Mojave Cogeneration Desert Tortoise Trust Fund, after approval from the California Energy Commission. The fund was set up in 1989 in conjunction with the California Energy Commission, California State Department of Fish and Game, and the Mojave Cogeneration Company. At that time, the Committee received \$67,480 in mitigation funds to be set aside for the purchase of desert tortoise habitat. The majority of the acreage acquired is located along the southern part of the preserve in Section 5, T32S, R38E. The remainder of the land acquired is in Section 27, T31S, R38E, north of the Interpretive Center. The balance of the Fund will be used as part of the continued effort to complete the purchase of the last private inholdings within the DTNA. Land purchases along the southern border of the preserve are especially significant in order to protect this part of the preserve with the completion of a boundary fence across this section.

## FEATURING VOLUNTEERS

Thank you to the following volunteers for their service to the Desert Tortoise Preserve Committee during the past six to nine months. They have donated an outstanding number of hours and/or done a service specific to promoting the protection of the desert tortoise.

***Dan Christenson*** - Dan volunteered a tremendous number of hours during this past spring's tortoise survey at the Desert Tortoise Research Natural Area. During February and April he spent 8 very long days setting up the grid poles. In April and May he spent 11 days doing the entire human impact survey portion of the project. The completion of the impact data sheets will result in at least an additional 10 days of work. No one but Dan really knows how many hours are in a "very long day". We do know it was a lot! We appreciate your expertise, Dan and we thank you for your personal dedication to tortoise preservation.

Retired from the California Department of Fish and Game, Dan first became involved with tortoise preservation in 1970. He supervised staff who had contact with Dr. Kristin Berry regarding a consultation by Cal Trans for highway construction impacts on tortoise habitat. He subsequently was further involved with the Desert Tortoise Council (DTC) and the DTPC as the Region 4 Endangered Species Coordinator from 1978-81. As the Kern/Tule Fish District Biologist, from 1984-96, he had occasional consultations with desert tortoise biologists. Dan initiated the DTNA fence patrol prior to the first DTPC/BLM fence party.

As a biologist, Dan began work in 1965 on the rehabilitation of the Golden Trout populations in the Little Kern Drainage. The project was completed in 1996 and the reintroduced trout populations will continue to be monitored. He was consulted by National Geographic to assist in a segment for a documentary on endangered species, in recognition of his expertise and involvement in that long term project. Watch for Dan, when the television special, "*Don't Say Goodbye*", airs sometime in December.

***Chuck Hemingway*** - Chuck Hemingway having recently moved to California City was enjoying getting to know the desert by taking long walks, when he noted some unusual activity at the Natural Area this past Spring. He introduced himself and discovered an opportunity to volunteer for the Spring Tortoise Survey project. During the formal part of the survey, Chuck helped for a varying number of hours on 17 different days in April and May. In addition he helped set up the grid poles on at least one very long day in April and helped take down the poles at the end of the project on 2 days in early June. Chuck, in his continuing personal exploration of the desert around California City, continues to monitor tortoise activity and to document and report any questionable situations to the DTPC Board as he did during the survey period. We thank you, Chuck.

***Sterling Kendrick*** - Special thanks to Sterling Kendrick of Ridgecrest for volunteering many hours monitoring and patrolling the Blackwater cabin and ranch structures of the Pilot Knob Grazing Allotment. Kendrick makes regular visits to Blackwater Well, located east of Cuddeback Lake. On a recent visit he repaired the roof of the outhouse and repaired a wire fence,

which had been cut. He retired seven and half years ago from Kerr McGee Chemical in Trona and has lived in the Ridgecrest area since 1951. Through his acquaintance with former DTPC Board member, Carol Panlaqui, Kendrick has had occasion to assist with naturalist duties at the DTNA and to accompany Gordon Wilshire on tortoise surveys at the preserve. His contributions have been indispensable.

***Outreach Projects Volunteers*** - Susan Moore and Mary Shepherd volunteered time to work an information booth and sell Committee fund raising products at two Turtle and Tortoise Club Shows, one in the San Fernando Valley and one in San Luis Obispo. Susan also worked at the Kern Valley Bioregions Festival in Kernville held in April. Laura Stockton and Mary represented the Committee in Kernville at the Vulture Festival on 27 September. The Committee always has a need for volunteers, especially members who are looking for an opportunity to become more active participants in our many projects.

Come to the Annual Meeting in January, learn more about our projects and talk with the members coordinating them. Everyone has some expertise, time, and energy that can be utilized.

## **HOLIDAY GIFT IDEAS!**

Time to plan your holiday gift giving.

Double your gift giving pleasure, by supporting the Desert Tortoise Preserve Committee's goals and special projects with the purchase of some of our unique fund raising products for those tortoise and nature lovers on your gift list.

We have T-shirts for both adults and children. Kids love the selection of postcards with photos by Bev Steveson of the various desert critters. We have a patch and lapel pin, mugs, caps, wind chimes, and a tortoise bolo tie and pendant. And don't forget the beautiful *Desert Tortoise with Wildflowers* poster.

Clip and mail the enclosed order sheet with your check to:

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

## **WISH LIST FOR THE NEW DTPC OFFICE IN RIVERSIDE**

Plans are nearing completion for opening a Desert Tortoise Preserve Committee office in Riverside by the end of the year. We need donations of office furniture, equipment, and supplies to make this dream come true.

The end of the year is fast approaching and this is an excellent time to give consideration to year-end charitable giving for tax purposes. Perhaps you have some of these items around the house, in the garage, or in storage and would like to donate them. Cash donations can be designated for establishing the office as well.

Office Furniture	Office Equipment	Miscellaneous
desk and chair six foot folding tables 2 to 4 chairs (stackable) 10 to 12 filing cabinets book cases computer work station	telephones IBM compatible 486 or better computer with monitor and modem capable of INTERNET connection LaserJet or quality ink jet printer plain paper FAX desk top copier	refrigerator (small) coffee maker electric tea kettle any office supplies

**Contact Jim Anderson at 951-683-8486 or Bob Brooks at 562-698-2980.**

### **CNN'S SPRING VISIT TO DTNA VIEWABLE VIA THE INTERNET**

If you have access to a computer with an INTERNET connection, you can revisit the CNN coverage of Jim Hill's spring visit to the Desert Tortoise Research Natural Area. Highlighted in the article is a 45-second video with footage of field biologist Tim Shields processing 1200, a very small juvenile tortoise, 56 millimeters in carapace length and weighing a whopping 47 grams. Also seen is an older adult female tortoise first processed in the initial survey in 1979. She has a carapace length of 239 mm and weighs 2650 grams, which is very close to her original measurements in 1979.

You can download and save the video for your future viewing entertainment by accessing the CNN WEB page at: <http://cnn.com/EARTH/9704/23/tortoise>

Many, many thanks to Jim Hill and his crew and to CNN for this beautiful high tech and extended coverage of the plight of the desert tortoise and for their support in highlighting the long term ongoing research at the DTRNA.