
Tortoise Tracks

The Desert Tortoise Preserve Committee, Inc.

Spring 2000 20:1



Joshua Tree, *Yucca brevifolia* – photographed at Pilot Knob Allotment, January 2000 by Bob Brooks

ANNUAL MEMBERSHIP MEETING REPORT

The Twenty-fifth Annual General Membership Meeting of the Desert Tortoise Preserve Committee was held Saturday, January 22, 2000 at the Holiday Inn, Palmdale, California.

President Bob Brooks welcomed the assembled members and guests, and introduced the Board of Trustees before getting down to the meeting agenda. The first item of business was the Treasurer's Report. Treasurer Dr. Kristin Berry distributed and reviewed the 1999 Draft Expense and Income Report.

The Treasurer's report was followed by Michael J. Connor's Executive Director's Report. Michael began by explaining what his position entails. The Executive Director implements the policies, acts and decisions of the Board of Trustees. After 25 years of land acquisition, the Committee has

accumulated multiple responsibilities that go with land ownership. These range from payment of taxes to the development of resource management plans for the DTTPC land holding etc. -- all of which Michael handles. He also handles membership issues, interacts with the public, fulfills the Committee's commitment to Earth Share of California (the work place giving program for the environment), produces brochures and maintains the web-site, writes comment letters on various projects, and works on regional planning efforts such as the West Mojave Plan. Along with his *work-type* work Michael described some fun projects such as overseeing the repair of the windmill at Pilot Knob and supervising the work parties. Michael reported that in 1999 the DTTPC web-site had nearly 250,000 hits and that volunteers directly contributed over 2700 hours to

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DTPC projects.

Contractor Jun Lee (Non-Profit Counsel) reported on habitat acquisition and mitigation. Jun reviewed the history of the Committee's habitat acquisition program, from actual land purchase and resale to development of a mitigation land bank. Jun outlined various components and aspects of the process including: 1) identification of habitat for acquisition, or other mitigation such as fencing and research; 2) negotiations and agreements; and 3) protection of habitat through conservation easements and re-sale of land to other agencies.

Next on the agenda was a series of project reports:

Desert Tortoise Research Natural Area (Laura Stockton, Board Member): Laura reviewed 1999 at the DTRNA including the spring and fall work parties. She acknowledged the work of Chuck Hemingway who regularly patrols the DTRNA boundary. Laura reported that last year the Committee had 2 Naturalists at the DTRNA, Karen Randall and Lou Silva, and that the Committee is searching for a Naturalist for spring 2000. Immediate goals for the DTRNA include working on the development of a revised ACEC plan with the Bureau of Land Management and another work party in March.

Pilot Knob (Karen Spangenberg, Board Member): Karen reviewed the history of the DTPC and The Wildlands Conservancy acquisition of the Pilot Knob Allotment. 1999 was a busy year at Pilot Knob. Karen acknowledged the work of caretaker, Sterling Kendrick, the major cleanup effort by the work party volunteers and restoration of the Pilot Knob

windmill.

Research (Kristin Berry, Board Member): In 1999, with funding from the California Energy Commission and the DTPC, a Mohave Ground Squirrel research project was begun in the DTRNA, Pilot Knob, and Kramer Hills areas. Seven squirrels were captured in 9100 trapping hours. This amounts to a net cost of some \$4,200 per squirrel, and is an indication that this is a rare animal indeed. Research will continue in year 2000, focussed on the Pilot Knob Allotment.

During 1999, two papers on the desert tortoise were published from work carried out at the DTRNA. Other papers regarding the invasion of alien plant species and competition of alien plant species with native plants are in preparation.

The DTPC is exploring the possibility of rearing hatchlings and juveniles in predator-proof pens to facilitate recovery of the desert tortoise at the DTRNA.

Government Agency Coordination (Mark Hagan, Board Member): Essential to the DTPC's land acquisition and management efforts is significant interaction and coordination with various government agencies. Mark reviewed the current DTPC/BLM coordination meeting, DTPC participation in the BLM Ridgecrest Area Steering Committee, and introductory meetings with Hector Villalobos, the new Manager of the Bureau of Land Management's Ridgecrest Field Office.

Regional Planning Efforts (Roger Dale, Board Member): Roger reviewed the DTPC's involvement in the Northern and Eastern Colorado Desert (NECO) Comprehensive Management Plan

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The Desert Tortoise Preserve Committee, Inc.

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SPRING 2000 WORK PARTY

Michael J. Connor

An enthusiastic crowd of volunteers filled the parking lot at the Desert Tortoise Research Natural Area on Saturday morning ready for a weekend of toil! Although there had been rain earlier in the week, this weekend the weather was glorious. Volunteers included DTPC supporters Evelyn Moran, Jack Woodson, Mark Massar, Chuck Hemingway, and Sterling Kendrick; Desert Survivors David McMullen, Meredith Jefferson, David Book, Lawrence Wilson, Peter Ruddock, and Bill Rolf; California Turtle & Tortoise Club's Ron Martin, Don Curran and Kirk Taylor (Inland Empire Chapter), Jim Misiak (Chino Branch) and Dane Fagundes (CenVal Chapter); Crystal McAdam and Jordy Blasi and their daughter Jennica who traveled all the way from Salt Lake City; and representing the DTPC Board were Trustee Laura Stockton and Executive Director Mike Connor. Joining the group were Dave Wash, Randy Masner, and Bob Parker from the BLM's Ridgecrest Field Office. Jack Stewart, City Manager of California City and a new DTPC member, dropped by for a short visit and chat.

The major project scheduled for the DTNA was the rehabilitation of the site of the old toilets and area adjacent to the new toilet. Scavenging parties were sent out from the DTNA to salvage rocks that were then used to line a new section of trail to the toilet. The rest of the volunteers set-to with shovels and made short work of leveling the dirt mounds over the site of the old toilet buildings. Dave Wash gave a "hands on" demonstration of some of the Bureau of Land Management's camouflage and "vertical mulching" techniques. With careful plantings of bunches of sterile rice straw, dead branches, and a scattering of the debris that accumulates around the base of creosotes and other shrubs, the site was given a "natural" appearance to prompt visitors to stick to the trail and allow natural restoration to occur. Several young creosote bushes and a cholla were planted on the site to help accelerate rehabilitation. These plants will be watered periodically by DTPC volunteer and nearby resident Chuck Hemingway, and hopefully one or two will survive. The overall effect was esthetically pleasing, and together with the path should minimize visitor impact and help the area

recover. The volunteers were delighted to have performed such an immediately rewarding task.

Dave Wash measured the dimensions of the existing staggered gate that was designed to thwart easy entrance to the DTNA by motor bikes. He found the gate to be within the tolerance for wheelchair accessibility. He suggested that if the southernmost end of the parking lot was designated "Handicapped Parking", then individuals who are wheelchair bound or need to use a walker would be able to reach the gate by travelling over hard-packed dirt immediately in front of where the Discovery Center is parked. This would not require any additional ground disturbance and is a simple way to enhance access.

By 11 am, after the panels in the Interpretive Kiosk had been cleaned and Bob Parker and volunteers had traveled to Section 5 to check the fence line, a caravan was ready to depart for the Pilot Knob grazing allotment. Due to the previous week's rains, it was decided that it was probably inadvisable to take the usual route straight along the 20 Mule Team Parkway to Blackwater Well. Instead, a more circuitous route was planned with a detour down Route 395 to old Fremont Road so that the caravan could get around the south end of not-so-dry-today Cuddeback Dry Lake.

On arrival at Blackwater Well, tasks were assigned to groups of volunteers and, despite the good shaking imparted by travelling over several miles of a rocky and washboard-rich dirt road, work began in earnest. By use of an ingenious arrangement of props, one group quickly removed a very unstable wooden shack that had been placed on a temporary foundation of railroad ties and an old tree root sometime in the early 1970s. The shack was full of trash and had actually moved a few inches since last inspected in January and was in imminent danger of collapse. Other groups cleaned up a nearby trash dump, removing more than 25 bags of cans, and worked on demarcation of the roads to enhance habitat recovery. A major clean up of the cabin complex was completed with removal of a *ton* of trash to the now enormous pile in the north corral to facilitate habitat recovery and reduce housing opportunities for the numerous

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DTPC 25TH ANNIVERSARY BANQUET AWARDS

On this special occasion, the Board of Trustees took the opportunity to recognize the significant contributions that so many have been made over the years. The list below includes those attendees who received awards.

SPECIAL SILVER TORTOISE AWARD

Kristin Berry

photomonitoring and tours of the DTNA for over 20 years.

GOLDEN TORTOISE

Ken Nagy

Marc Graff - An active and effective advocate for the desert tortoise and DTNA in several capacities.

LARGE PHOTO PLAQUE

Bureau of Land Management Desert District
(accepted by Tim Salt)
Bureau of Land Management Ridgecrest Field
Office (accepted by Hector Villalobos)

Chuck Hemingway - As a local resident provides ongoing monitoring of the DTNA, support for the Naturalist each spring, assistance for tortoise researchers and volunteer maintenance crews.

SMALL PHOTO PLAQUE

Alan Baldwin
Tracy and Glenn Goodlett
Marc Sazaki
Desert Survivors
George Moore

Mary Ann Henry - For her botanical expertise in helping create and update plant lists and for advocacy for desert habitat protection.

Sterling Kendrick - Serves the Committee at Pilot Knob by patrolling, providing maintenance and acting as host/interpreter for the site.

SPECIAL 25 YEAR CERTIFICATES

Lou Boll - BLM Bakersfield District Manager during early years of the DTNA.

Ed LaRue - Former officer and member of the Board of Trustees, and a long time advocate for the tortoise.

Ray Butler - For outstanding volunteerism including coordination and installation of memorial plaques at the DTNA and more recently constructing shelves at the DTPC office.

David McMullen - Coordinates the Desert Survivors organization's participation in the spring and fall work parties on the DTNA and Pilot Knob areas.

California Turtle & Tortoise Club's Executive Board, Foothill Chapter, Inland Empire Chapter, Valley Chapter, and Westchester Chapter - For ongoing contributions in fund raising, providing a forum for public education in publications and events, and for all-round support of the Committee and its activities.

Susan Moore - Served as products coordinator for many years attending fund raising events, maintaining the product inventory and handling mail orders.

Alan Dale - For his many years of service maintaining the DTPC post office box and the membership list.

Bob Parker - BLM biologist with an ongoing professional and personal commitment to the DTNA, participating in research, coordinating and participating in work parties and management of the DTNA.

Betty Forgey - A founding member of the Desert Tortoise Preserve Committee and its first President. Betty served the Committee in many capacities including President and Secretary of the Board of Trustees and was involved in giving tours, fundraising, and created the first product.

Peggy Scanlan - For her help with product sales and education programs.

Joyce Schlachter - A BLM biologist who has participated and helped coordinate and participated in a number of the spring and fall work parties in addition to adding her research expertise at the DTNA.

Warren Forgey - A founding member of the DTPC who was a member of the Board of Trustees and involved on onsite maintenance,

Mary Shepherd - As *Tortoise Tracks* Editor and for outreach and work party activities.

25TH ANNIVERSARY BANQUET



Mr. Lou Boll, BLM Bakersfield District Manager during the formation of the DTNA, turns the tables at the awards banquet by returning a photograph (for our Riverside office) he received from the DTPC 25 years ago.



Dr. Kenneth Nagy, UCLA researcher received the Golden Tortoise Award for his outstanding contributions to the study of tortoise physiology and biology.



Dr. Kristin Berry, Silver Tortoise Award recipient, presents a plaque to Mr. Tim Salt, Bureau of Land Management Desert District Manager.

Photos by Letty Brooks



Mr. Hector Villalobos, Field Office Manager, accepts an award on behalf of the BLM's Ridgecrest Area Field Office.

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and the West Mojave Planning efforts. The draft NECO plan (which includes the Chuckawalla Bench and Chemehuevi areas of the Colorado Desert within Eastern California) should be released for public comment sometime this year.

Educational Outreach (Rae Packard, Board Member): Rae reviewed her trip to the California City schools and government offices. The Committee also provided an information and

product sales table at the Desert Tortoise Council's (DTC) workshop in Ridgecrest and at the Southwest Herpetology exhibit in the San Fernando Valley.

Mojave Desert Discovery Centers (Jun Lee, Non-Profit Counsel): Jun described the design, locations, and interactive/educational content of the Mojave Desert Discovery Center (MDDC) Kiosks. Fabrication and implementation of these

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rats and rodents. The remaining fence posts from a dismantled corral were removed as was a lamp post that was curiously located just east of the cabin complex.

On Saturday evening, the group assembled around the traditional campfire in front of the cabin to eat dinner (and a scrumptious cake baked by CTTC member Bettyalice Kinder) and to socialize. There was a fine clear sky that was great for stargazing and for watching the bats flitter about.

The main tasks on Sunday included dragging a long abandoned horse trailer to the trash pile; finishing marking out the roads; and removing a fallen fence. The latter was a mile long stretch of barbed wire fence that ran from the northern allotment boundary east to a hilltop. Much of the fence was lying on the ground, and the western half had apparently never been erected at all. After several hours of cutting the wire into manageable sections the volunteers packed most of the fencing out, leaving the remaining third of a mile for the next work party. Later, a work party group drove out to do some cleanup work at the 80 acre parcel located just west of the artillery range owned by the Committee. Despite the heat, the volunteers filled another 22 trash bags with cans and hauled an assortment of large pieces of metal debris to the side of the road to be collected at a later date. The metal debris included galvanized blades from a relatively modern windmill that must have stood nearby at some time.

Lots of interesting observations were made on the trip. When I checked the area around the Blackwater Well windmill shortly after arriving there at about noon, I was astonished to discover a rather soggy, small bat clinging for dear life to a rock in the trough that provides fresh water for birds and other wildlife. I fished out the bedraggled bat with a stick to avoid the risk of getting bitten. Bob Parker identified it as a California Myotis. The bats have probably only recently emerged from hibernation in the area. Perhaps it had fallen into the ice-cold water the previous evening and had been too stunned by the cold to get out? The bat was placed in on a shelf in the dark barn to dry out. It disappeared some time later, and was hopefully one of the half dozen that flitted around the cabin shortly after dusk. This weekend was the first warm one of the year so few

live reptiles were encountered, but numbers of side-blotched and horned lizards were seen. One of the volunteers on trash pickup found remains of 2 tortoises, including the beautiful, intact shell of a juvenile that had been left on a rock just above a pack rat nest atop a craggy hilltop. Remains of two more tortoises were discovered on Sunday while the fallen fence was being removed. Besides the bats, several of the resident mammal species were sighted or made their presence felt. The trash pickers inadvertently flushed out a few black tailed hares (Jackrabbits) and several antelope ground squirrels were spotted in the afternoons. The local coyote pack treated us all to a protracted serenade as we ate our breakfast on Sunday morning.

Spring is a special time in the Mojave Desert and I am sure that our volunteers enjoyed their weekend as much as I did. Even so, our volunteers accomplished an amazing amount of work and deserve all our thanks. They not only completed their appointed tasks, they even began drawing up plans for the fall -- weatherproofing the Blackwater Well cabin is high on the agenda.

If you are interested in volunteering for the fall work party, please call me at (909) 683-3872 or e-mail me at <dtpc@pacbell.net>, to be added to our volunteers mailing list.

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kiosks will occur in late spring. The MDCC project is a major educational outreach to the general public by the DTPC.

Following the project reports, Mark Hagan acknowledged the illustrious history of the DTPC. He stated that this being the 25th anniversary, it was a good juncture to look ahead to the future. He introduced Karen Spangenberg who outlined the Committee's goals for the year 2000.

The business portion of the meeting concluded with elections to the Board of Trustees. Robert Brooks, Letty Brooks and Mark Hagan were nominated for election and were unanimously elected on a show of hands for three-year terms. The general meeting adjourned at 5:00 p.m.

DESERT TORTOISE PRESERVE COMMITTEE

MEMBERSHIP/DONOR FORM

NAME _____ DATE _____ NEW _____ (Check one)
 ADDRESS _____ RENEWAL _____
 CITY _____
 STATE _____ ZIP _____

- Individual membership \$ 15 annually []
- Family membership \$ 20 annually []
- Sponsor membership \$ 30 annually []
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Enclosed is my donation of \$ _____

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The DTPC is an IRS recognized tax-exempt 501 (c)(3) nonprofit corporation. All contributions above the basic \$15 annual membership dues are tax-deductible to the full extent allowed by law.

All members and donors receive the quarterly newsletter *Tortoise Tracks*.

Membership and donor information are kept confidential and will not be disclosed to third parties.

I WANT TO VOLUNTEER

My area of interest/expertise is:

My e-mail address is:

New Member Appointed To The Board of Trustees

At its February 27 meeting in Mojave, California, the Desert Tortoise Preserve Committee's Board of Trustees appointed Arthur (Skip) Braudrick to fill one of the vacant Board positions.

Skip was born in Honolulu in 1941, and raised primarily in California's Sonoma and Monterey Counties with short stints in Virginia and Illinois (his father was in the navy). Skip worked for the California Department of Forestry from 1959 – 1965, and for the last three years was a captain. He fought fires throughout California including Southern California. He went on to college, graduating with a degree in history from Cal-Berkeley 1968 and subsequently was awarded a Doctor of Jurisprudence from UC Davis. He became a member of the California Bar in 1972.

Skip served first as a deputy and later as Assistant District Attorney (9 years or so) and as a public defender (6 or 7 years) in Monterey

County, followed by a brief time in private practice. For the last eleven years, Skip has served as a Deputy Public Defender for Los Angeles County at the downtown courthouse where he defends people charged with serious crimes.

Skip centers his leisure time around the outdoors, with a deep interest in natural history, backpacking, climbing (past), fishing, and a fondness for literature and retrievers. He and his wife Marilyn live in the San Fernando Valley. Their children are all over age 21.



Tortoise Tracks

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Volunteer Opportunities

The DTPC needs volunteers to help staff the information and product sales table/booth at outreach events and to participate in the annual fall work party. No prior experience is necessary. Hours of participation are flexible.

April 8-9, 2000 – *Antelope Valley Poppy Festival*, Lancaster, CA (10 a.m. – 6 p.m.).

April 21-23, 2000 - *Desert Tortoise Council Symposium*. The DTPC needs symposium attendees who can help at DTPC's table.

April 29, 2000 – Kern Valley *Bioregions Festival*, Kernville, CA.

May 6-7, 2000 - *California City Tortoise Days*. Help staff the DTPC booth in California City and/or assist at the DTNA.

September 30, 2000 – Kern Valley *Turkey Vulture Festival*, Kernville, CA.

Fall 2000 Work Party – Each spring and fall the Committee hosts its popular work parties. Groups of 20-30 volunteers gather to spend a weekend maintaining tortoise preserve facilities and to enjoy a close encounter with the Mojave Desert. **The next work party is tentatively scheduled for October 28-29, 2000.**

For more information on a particular event or to join our volunteers e-mail list send an e-mail to: <dtpc@pacbell.net> or call Michael at (909) 683-3872.

Desert Tortoise Council Schedules 25th Annual Symposium

The Desert Tortoise Council will hold its 25th Annual Symposium beginning on Friday, April 21 thru Sunday, April 23, 2000 at The Orleans Hotel in Las Vegas, Nevada. Registration is \$75 for members and \$95 for nonmembers. For more information call Tim Duck at (435) 628-7231.
