



# Tortoise Tracks



The Desert Tortoise Preserve Committee, Inc.

Summer 2016 36:2



## EVENTS

### Rage Against the Invasives

- by Jill Estrada

On April 2, volunteers gathered to participate in the annual Spring Work Party. Work took place at our newly acquired land adjacent to Springbok solar farm in the Western expansion area of the Desert Tortoise Research Natural Area. The 170-acre parcel of land is split in half by Cache Creek, a highly valued water source for wildlife during the rainy season. The area West of Cache Creek, closer to the Springbok solar farm, has a noticeably higher density of non-native invasive plants than the area East of the creek. The work party focused on removing non-native invasive plants from the Southwestern corner of the parcel. The most common invasive plants that were found and removed were Tumble Mustard (*Sisymbrium altissimum*) and Russian Thistle, or

Tumbleweed (*Salsola ssp.*). Both species are highly effective at dispersal by breaking from the ground prior to germination and tumbling across the open desert, spreading their seeds.

Invasive plant management is a critical part of conserving the desert tortoise and its habitat. Non-native plants pose a serious threat to the survival of wildlife by replacing food sources and shelter. When a landscape containing a variety of native species such as the Creosote bush, Paperbag bush, Spiny Hop-sage, and a number of small annuals and perennials is replaced by a few invasive species, animals lose places to hide from predators, places to build nests, and nutritionally rich food. By removing these invasive plants, we allow for native species to return and create a more suitable habitat to support wildlife.

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West of Cache Creek:  
Abundance of non-native plants



East of Cache Creek:  
Creosote bushes

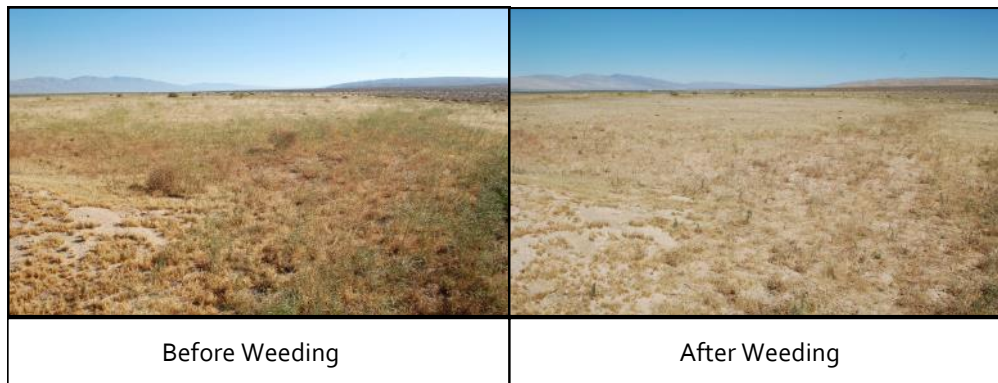


Invasive Weeds removed by volunteers

A team of 21 volunteers, including a group of students from Lancaster High School, traveled a total of 2,378 miles to attend the work party. **Bonnie Ahern** checked in the volunteers prior to them receiving an introduction by **Jill Estrada**. Although it was a hot day, volunteers immediately got to work removing the abundant plants and competing for who would bag the most. A 20-yard bin was used to haul off the day's work. By the end of the day, volunteers had removed a total of 323.1 lbs. of Tumble Mustard and 244 Russian Thistle plants! All of the hard work ended in wonderful lunch spread of hot dogs and veggie dogs generously cooked by **Craig Bansmer**, and coleslaw, fruit salad, and cookies, provided by volunteers.

The work party not only helped our organization fight the invasion of non-native plants, it gave volunteers a view of the solar farm and a glimpse into some of the threats desert tortoise habitat is facing.

We would like to thank all of the dedicated volunteers for driving many miles and enduring the hot desert sun. With your help, we are resurrecting the desert ecosystem to support future generations of desert tortoises.



## DTPC Calendar of Events and Volunteer Opportunities

- **June 11**: DTPC Board Meeting; Ridgecrest
- **September 17**: DTPC Board Meeting; Riverside Office
- **October 1-2, 2016**: DTPC Fall Work Party; DTRNA (camping Saturday night)

### The DTPC would like to thank the following volunteers:

Ron Berger	Bob Wood	Greg Cate	Steve Ishii	Jennifer Schoengarth
Dr. Kristin Berry	Rachel Woodard	Koleen Dearmore	Karen Jefchak	Carrie Woods
Chuck Hemingway	Dave Zantiny	Allan Eggleton	Stieg Klein	Mingling Yinpoch
Greg Lathrop	Bonny Ahern	Jill Estrada	Vincent Leveque	
Jun Lee	Craig Bansmer	Jaylene Gutierrez	Danielle Melgoza	
Freya Reder	Glen Baumbach	Chuck Hemingway	Lily Parsons	
Laura Stockton	Amoire Brown	Marlene Ishii	Heather Ponek	

For more information call (951) 683-3872 or send an email to [dtpc@pacbell.net](mailto:dtpc@pacbell.net) or check out the DTPC's website [www.tortoise-tracks.org](http://www.tortoise-tracks.org) and Facebook page [www.facebook.com/dtpc.inc](http://www.facebook.com/dtpc.inc).



## EDUCATION/OUTREACH

### Naturalist Report

Article and Photos by Sharon Schafer

Where did the time go? The naturalist season is over and I loved every bit of it. What a privilege it was to spend time here. The opportunity with DTPC placed me at the place where I am most comfortable; at the convergence of art, science, and environmental education. It gave me the opportunity to talk with visitors as well as observe, sketch, photograph, and paint the life and landscapes of the Desert Tortoise Research Natural Area.

I have always been in love with the Mojave Desert; austere, enchanting, and elusive. It is a land of mysteries, a keeper of secrets, a land of great contradictions and contrasts ... a land of much beauty and little rain. I have found that the Mojave is a land that closely guards its secrets and only reveals itself to the patient, persistent seeker. My three-month sojourn at the DTRNA as naturalist gave me the needed gift of time. Time to join the rhythm of this unique arid land ecosystem and observe its path from spring to summer.



When I began March 15<sup>th</sup> I was greeted with an overwhelming display of color - alkali goldfields, Coreopsis, and Amsinckia all joining forces to create a solid carpet of gold stunningly accented here and there by the purple notch-leaf Phacelia. Wildlife at DTRNA in March and early April was obvious and abundant, lived with a feeling of urgency, energy, and purpose. Spring was the time for its inhabitants to feed, to mate, raise young, and prepare for summer. During this time, while things were lush and plentiful, and temperatures moderate; horned larks built nests, kit foxes dug dens, and tortoises emerged from their deep winter burrows to wade through fields of flowers and grasses.

Visitors were abundant as well. Some were from as far away as Australia, Holland, and Germany, while others were as local as first-time family visits from California City. Many were regional visitors that made the trek to us from the San Diego, Los Angeles, or Bay areas. Many were on the way to see the wildflowers at Death Valley, others came specifically to see the DTRNA. No matter their origin or ultimate destination, they all visited to walk our trails, explore, learn, and attempt to see our iconic desert tortoises.

Many people are prone to consider the desert's stillness, silence and apparent immobility as a deficit; a land left wanting and imperfect. They only see an arid landscape as lifeless and immutable and consider instead the rhythm and speed of more dynamic landscapes as ecosystems that are full, rich, robust, and complete. Our obsession with dynamic temporality leaves the desert often undiscovered and under appreciated and we increasingly marginalize and under value the life that inhabits it.

Terry Tempest Williams once wrote; *"When you say there is nothing out there, what you are really saying is that I cannot see."* It is my hope that this season I have opened eyes to how remarkable this place is. I believe that our visitors, having walked our trails, will come away changed; no longer seeing the desert as a barren and lifeless land, but rather as a miracle of life's inventiveness and tenacity against great odds. It has been said that the Mojave is pure bone. It is just that. A land stripped of non-essentials, a land that is not so much harsh but rather unrelentingly real.

As caretakers of this amazing place we face a great responsibility, and it is one that we can not fail. The Mojave and its fragile life is counting on us.



## Desert Tortoise Days: A Celebration of Tortoises!

Article and photos by: Jill Estrada

Saturday, May 14th marked the annual Desert Tortoise Days, an event which takes place in California City each year. The event brings families together to celebrate the desert tortoise and the community. California City is the host city of the Desert Tortoise Research Natural Area, and thus is home to many of our visitors. DTPC attended the event alongside California Turtle and Tortoise Club-Ridgecrest, which provided four species of live tortoises for attendees to see. Visitors were thrilled with seeing their native tortoise and with learning more about the different species of tortoises and where they come from. Our booth offered information about our organization and the Desert Tortoise Research Natural Area, provided general information about the biology of the desert tortoise and threats that they are facing, and hosted a matching game where children had to determine what different desert animals ate. This was a great opportunity to teach them about the desert food chain and about certain adaptations that desert species have evolved to help them survive in the desert. Our booth saw a lot of traffic, as families came to visit the tortoises and learn more about how we are protecting them. Overall, the event was a great celebration of desert tortoises that are found just outside the city, and a great way to show the city what we are doing to protect them. Special thanks to **Chuck Hemingway**, **Allan Eggleton**, and **Dave Zantiny** for helping out at the event.



## DTPC Hosts Master's Students Preparing Restoration Plan

Article by Jill Estrada

Photo provided by Bob Wood



On June 5th, DTPC board member **Kristin Berry** and DTPC preserve manager **Jill Estrada** hosted members of the Desert Tortoise Council, the Desert Tortoise Preserve Committee, and two master's degree students from Bren School of Environmental Science and Management at the Desert Tortoise Research Natural Area. The visitors were given a tour showing areas of suitable tortoise habitat and areas that are in need of restoration in the Eastern and Western Expansion Areas. In the coming year, the students will be creating and implementing a restoration plan to fulfill their master's degree requirements. The possibility of them restoring denuded areas on DTPC lands is

instrumental in helping us protect the land and create more suitable habitats for desert wildlife. The Desert Tortoise Preserve Committee has in the past and will continue to collaborate with graduate programs to protect and study the desert while helping students complete their graduate degrees.

## Our Commitment to our Members

As our biggest supporters, our donors and members are very important to us. This is why the Desert Tortoise Preserve Committee has a strict security policy to keep your information confidential. Papers containing personal information are immediately shredded after use. Any emails sent between the board that may contain member information are encrypted. Lastly, contributor information is not disclosed to third parties.

## LAND MANAGEMENT

### Land Monitoring - by Jill Estrada

Photos provided by Jill Estrada, Steve Ishii, and Lily Parsons

The Desert Tortoise Preserve Committee owns and manages close to 8,000 acres of land throughout the Mojave desert as well as manages the entirety of the Desert Tortoise Research Natural Area. In order to make critical management decisions, land monitoring is required on a regular basis, to assess the status of the land. The process by which we monitor our lands is very extensive and extremely important. Prior to a trip, an enormous amount of preparation takes place. Monitors must study the report written from the previous monitoring trip for any important findings and things to be aware of for the upcoming trip. Next, maps of the parcel and the area are created or collected along with any GPS data to help with navigation. Depending on the size of the parcel, a monitoring trip can become a multi-day trip and requires a lot of planning. Because many of these parcels are located in remote areas of the desert, safety is the highest priority. A list of tools and safety items must be taken on each trip to ensure that monitors are prepared for a number of situations that could occur.

During monitoring, many different things are measured and logged to be written into a monitoring report. Information such as species of plant life; observations, signs, and indications of wildlife; observations of trespassing and illegal use of the land; soil type and condition; and weather conditions are collected. Numerous photos and GPS coordinates are taken of interesting observations and the general landscape. This information informs us of the wildlife biodiversity inhabiting the land and whether or not trespassing has occurred. All of the information collected is critical to our ability to manage the land and ensure that further trespass is mitigated. The reports are also used to prove compliance for the numerous mitigation contracts with which we are involved.

If you are an avid outdoor enthusiast and are interested in becoming a qualified volunteer land monitor, please contact us.



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### The Desert Tortoise Preserve Committee, Inc.

Founded 1974

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## RESEARCH

### Biological Surveys at the DTRNA - by Jill Estrada

This year is becoming a very active year for research at the Desert Tortoise Research Natural Area. Several studies are taking place this Spring/Summer to gather baseline data for future long-term monitoring and action on recently acquired parcels in the western and eastern expansion areas. During late March through April a team of botanists conducted a plant survey to determine the plant diversity found on the DTRNA. Additional studies to be completed include:

- Camera trapping of Mohave ground squirrels (and incidentally collecting data on presence of Burrowing Owls, American badgers, desert kit foxes, and coyotes).
- Surveys for desert tortoises and desert tortoise sign (burrows, scats, tracks, shell-skeletal remains).
- Surveys for dens, tunnels, scent marking areas and scat piles of mammalian predators (American badgers, desert kit foxes, and coyotes)
- Presence of Burrowing Owls (use of tortoise burrows, kit fox dens, as well as perches)
- Areas requiring trash removal and weeding, one of the early steps in restoration
- Documentation of human impacts to the parcels (counts, amounts of surface area disturbed)
- Species surveys of vegetation found on the parcels

This research will provide us with information about the wildlife currently found on our land and will help us create adaptive management decisions to further protect it from human-related threats.

### The Coalition for a Balanced Environment: An Update

- by Jill Estrada

Introduced in our Spring edition of “Tortoise Tracks” was a new organization supported by coalition of concerned individuals, conservation groups, renewable energy, and agricultural groups and founded by the Desert Tortoise Preserve Committee. The Coalition for a Balanced Environment is working to enhance and refine raven management practices throughout California. This year, CBE has begun taking its message to numerous other organizations, agricultural groups, state, and federal agencies that share the frustration that is felt from the growing raven numbers. Additionally, a survey of dumpsters was completed prior to and after the distribution of informational flyers. During the survey, 114 sites were visited in the cities of California City, Ridgecrest, and Mojave. Prior to the distribution, 55%, 71%, and 58% of dumpsters were kept closed and 28, 5, and 2 ravens were seen in Ridgecrest, California City, and Mojave, respectively. Following the flyers, percentages of closed dumpsters rose by as much as 10% and number of observed ravens dropped. This data shows us that subsidized food is a strong attractant to ravens, which has encouraged them to permanently remain in desert communities, close to populations of desert tortoises and other vulnerable species. Understanding what measures can be done to reduce raven numbers or discourage them from remaining in the desert will help reach our goal of managing populations to a balanced level. For more information or to endorse this effort, visit <http://www.cbecalifornia.org/>



## 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"/> \$20 Individual | <input type="checkbox"/> \$75 Benefactor        |
| <input type="checkbox"/> \$30 Family     | <input type="checkbox"/> \$100 Patron/Corporate |
| <input type="checkbox"/> \$50 Sponsor    | <input type="checkbox"/> \$500 Life Membership  |

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 endowment.  
Please accept an additional donation of:

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> \$250   | <input type="checkbox"/> \$2,500        |
| <input type="checkbox"/> \$500   | <input type="checkbox"/> \$5,000        |
| <input type="checkbox"/> \$1,000   | <input type="checkbox"/> Other \$ _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Marketable Securities (Stock): Contact DTPC Finance Committee Chairperson, Greg Lathrop at <a href="mailto:2redgrey@gmail.com">2redgrey@gmail.com</a> or (415) 637-7187 for instruction |   |

Let's get the endowment started!

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

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Please make your check payable to DTPC and mail to:

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

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. All contributions and/or annual membership dues are fully tax-deductible. Contributor information is kept confidential and is not disclosed to third parties.

\* [www.tortoise-tracks.org](http://www.tortoise-tracks.org) \*



# Tortoise Tracks

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**When visiting the desert, always remember to  
check under your vehicle for wildlife.**

