

The Desert Tortoise Council Newsletter Spring 1997

OUR 22nd YEAR

Our Goal: To assure the continued survival of viable populations of the desert tortoise throughout its range

22nd SYMPOSIUM RECAP

The 22nd Annual Desert Tortoise Council Symposium was held for the third year in a row at Sam's Town from Friday, April 4 through Sunday, April 6, 1997. The Monday field trip was to the Lake Mead National Recreation Area and the Grapevine Springs Desert Tortoise Permanent Study Plot where approximately 50 tortoises have been equipped with radio transmitters during a research project on demography and survivorship.

Dr. Richard Knight, editor of the Island Press book entitled *Wildlife and Recreationists: Coexistence Through Management and Research*, coordinated and chaired an excellent special session on the many aspects of impacts by recreationists on wildlife. Some quotes from Dr. Knight after the symposium: "We were overwhelmed by the dedication and friendliness of your organization. I suspect you are protecting more desert in your work than any other single conservation initiative, I wish you continued success."

Dr. Anne Ehrlich gave the keynote address on "The Betrayal of Science and Reason: How Anti Environmental rhetoric Threatens our Future." Both Drs. Knight and Ehrlich kindly signed their books at the Special Reception Saturday evening in honor of the host of special speakers.

1998 SYMPOSIUM NEWS: TUCSON!

We heard you. One of the most popular proposed symposium cities registered in our 1996 questionnaire was Tucson, in the land of the Sonoran desert tortoise. Our arrangements and host committee is forming and planning the 23rd Annual Desert Tortoise Council Symposium in 1998. We are seeking proposals from hotels in Tucson, Arizona. For you long-range planners, we are focusing on the first weekend in April, but intend to be flexible with March or other April dates, excluding religious holidays. With any luck, we will have an outstanding wildflower season, so bring your camera. We will keep you informed as soon as a site has been chosen.

1996 PROCEEDINGS

The 1996 Desert Tortoise Council Symposium Proceedings are completed! They were edited by Breck Bartholomew and are in a handsome new format. Due to circumstances beyond our control, they were not available at the 1997 symposium. Those who placed orders will receive them as soon as we relocate our storage facility. We appreciate your patience. The charge for members is \$10.00, \$15.00 for nonmembers.

ANNUAL BUSINESS MEETING

The 22nd annual Desert Tortoise Council business meeting was held on Friday, April 4, 1997, prior to the opening session of the Desert Tortoise Council Symposium. Elections of officers included outgoing Senior Co-chair Ed LaRue as Recording Secretary and Corresponding Secretary; Marc Sazaki, treasurer; Dan Patterson, Junior Co-Chair; and Tim Duck, Junior Co-chair-elect. Katherine Zander was installed as the new Senior Co-chairperson. Good luck Katherine, and our thanks to Ed LaRue.

PHOTO CONTEST

This marked the second year that prints were submitted and Symposium attendees voted on the photographs. All first place winners received \$25 and the best of show an additional \$25. First place winners are listed below.

1. WILD DESERT TORTOISES

Carolyn Lackey.

2. CAPTIVE (PET) DESERT TORTOISES

Karen Kampfer.

3. OTHER DESERT REPTILES

Jeanie Evenden and Michael Walker.

4. DESERT MAMMALS

Susan Williams.

5. OTHER DESERT WILDLIFE

NO ENTRY.

6. WILD DESERT PLANTS

Jeanie Evenden and Michael Walker.

7. DESERT SCENICS

Jeanie Evenden and Michael Walker.

8. TORTOISE CONSERVATION

Jeanie Evenden and Michael Walker.

PHOTO CONTEST/BEST OF SHOW: Susan Williams

BLM PROPOSES MINING REGS

The following report comes from the Wildlife Management Institute. With little apparent change of legislation being enacted to reform the outdated 1872 Mining Law, the Bureau of Land Management, which administers the law, has proposed to change mining abuses on public land through regulations by 1999. It is an ambitious effort and observers report that lawsuits surely will follow. BLM will try to develop a programmatic, national environmental impact statement and regulations that can weather the almost certain lawsuits. The agency already has asked, via the Federal register, for public input on developing the EIS.

According to Jim Coffin writing in Public Land News, Interior Secretary Bruce Babbitt ordered BLM to use the regulatory process and create tougher environmental standards for hard rock mining on public land. Babbitt reportedly requested that "state-of-the-art technology" be required as the standard for mine operations, rather than the current "normal operator's practice."

BLM reports that it will comply with the Secretary's orders by revising the regulations to seek better coordination with states, improving the performance standards that operators must follow, and require those standards be extended to operations of 5 acres or less, which is not now the case.

SUIT TO LIST FLAT-TAILED HORNED LIZARD

The Tucson Herpetological Society, Defenders of Wildlife, the Horned Lizard Conservation Society, and others have sued the Fish and Wildlife Service to list the flat tailed horned lizard as a threatened species. The flat tailed horned lizard lives in extreme southeastern California, southwestern Arizona, and northwestern Sonora. FWS proposed the species as threatened in 1993, but has failed to act since. FWS and several agencies including BLM are preparing a conservation agreement that would remove many of the threats to the lizard, but the plan is not yet completed and FWS has yet to determine if enough threats would be removed to warrant dropping their proposed rule. FWS is supposed to make final decisions 1 year after a proposed rule. Nearly 4 years have passed.

COUNCIL PROJECTS

The Council is tracking, participating in, or commenting on several projects including those listed below: Molycorp Mine hazardous materials spill and expansion

Chemgold Mine

West Mojave Coordinated Management Plan

Fort Irwin expansion

Ward Valley low-level nuclear waste dump

Desert Tortoise Council World Wide Web page

Desert Tortoise Council Brochure

Arizona Interagency Desert Tortoise Plan for Sonoran Desert Tortoise

BLM land exchanges in Arizona and Nevada

BLM burro removals in Nevada

Wildlife guzzlers in Mojave Desert

Information requests

HIGH COURT RULING ON ESA LAWSUITS

On March 19, the Supreme Court ruled unanimously that private property owners and other interested people could sue the federal government for actions taken under the Endangered Species Act, according to the Wildlife Management Institute. The decision cuts two ways, in that the court said that suits could be brought by conservationists who have no legal "interest" when the government action resulted in less protection for endangered species. Thus, all sides of the issue are claiming victory. Previously, only citizens with an interest in preserving species were thought to have standing under the ESA..

FAIR MARKET VALUE BILL INTRODUCED

This spring, congressman George Miller (CA) introduced a bill to require commodity users of public lands to pay fair market value for the resources they extract. Reportedly, the bill has little chance of passage, but Miller was expected to use it as a negotiating tool during House discussions on "corporate welfare," according to the Wildlife Management Institute. The bill, H.R. 919, would make mining companies pay royalties, public land livestock operators pay higher grazing fees, and timber companies to quit below-cost timber sales. We have not heard anything lately on this bill. See the mining REGS article on page 2 for the administration's attempt at public lands mining reform.

**SOCIETY FOR CONSERVATION BIOL-
OGY NEWSLETTER ONLINE**

If you have Internet capability, check out the Society
For Conservation Biology web site at www.conbio.org.

The newsletter will usually be posted within a week of
its mailing date.