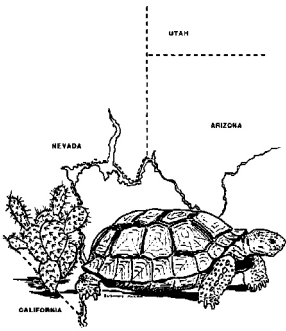


THE DESERT TORTOISE COUNCIL NEWSLETTER



Spring 2004
OUR 29TH YEAR

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

2004 LAS VEGAS SYMPOSIUM

The 29th Annual Desert Tortoise Council Symposium returned to Sam's Town in Las Vegas for the second year in a row, from February 20 to 23, 2004. There were close to 250 attendees.

Several of the symposium highlights were provided by Dr. Robert C. Stebbins, renowned Emeritus Professor at the University of California, Berkeley. He signed copies of his new and updated A Field Guide to Western Reptiles and Amphibians, published in March of 2003, at the mixer before the banquet. We had 200 copies of the book. We kept about 55 signed copies as future raffle and auction items, and all the rest were sold! He also signed copies of previous volumes that people brought and various prints of his. Dr. Stebbins also completely donated two paintings with tortoises in them. The smaller painting sold on the spot for \$900. The larger painting of dueling males went for the remarkable sum of \$3,000. A record amount for any auction item. Thank you Dr. Stebbins and everyone that bought auction items and raffle tickets. It was the most profitable raffle and auction ever!

We had a diverse program, with many new speakers. Dr. Matt Brooks, winner of this year's Annual Award, gave the Plenary address on 15 years of research on disturbance effects in desert tortoise habitat. The Desert Tortoise Recovery Plan Assessment Committee reported on their work, as did state and federal agencies on their recovery actions. Featured speaker Richard Franz gave a presentation on Gopher Tortoise Evolution: West versus East: Rethinking Some Old Paradigms. To finish off the first night, there was a Celebration of Life for Dr. David J. Morafka with remarks by Kenneth Nagy, a Reading of the Obituary by Robert Murphy, and presentations by friends, colleagues, students, and family.

Saturday began with a special session on the effects of roads on wildlife, chaired by Bill Boarman. Because of the interest in the topic, a similar session will likely be held at the 2005 Symposium. We sold plenty of copies of the 13-author book, Road Ecology, Science, and Solutions published in 2003 by Island Press.

Other sessions that day included New Methods and Techniques for Conducting Field Research and Managing Mitigation Projects, Health and Disease Research: New Advances and Findings, Part I, and Non-profit Organizations: Conservation, Education, and Other Professional Efforts Relating to Desert Tortoise Recovery. Saturday's featured speaker was Anders G. J. Rhodin, of the Chelonian Research Foundation. He talked about Taking the Road Less Traveled: Personal Progress and Partnerships in Turtle Conservation. Saturday concluded with Dr. Stebbins signing books, the banquet, awards, and the raffle and auction. About 130 attended the banquet, and about that many went through the line to have Dr. Stebbins sign books! Lora Smith gave a wonderful banquet address titled: In search of the Angonoka tortoise of Madagascar.

The technical sessions continued on Sunday with sessions titled: Health and Disease Research, Part II, Studies of Desert Tortoise Distribution, Abundance, Status, and Demography, Desert Tortoise Activities and Social Behavior, and concluded with Studies Directed at Desert Tortoise Recovery and Management.

Field trips on Monday went to Christmas Tree Pass/Newberry Mountains led by Ross Haley and to Ivanpah Valley led by Peter Woodman. It was a successful symposium and was attended by almost 250. Special thanks to Bob Turner, the Local Host Chair, and the literally dozens of folks that contribute to a meeting of this size.

The program and abstracts can be found on our web page at:

<http://deserttortoise.org/symposium/2004/index.html>

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<http://www.deserttortoise.org>

Desert Tortoise Natural Area and Preserve Committee:

Michael Connor, Desert Tortoise Preserve
Committee, Inc., 4067 Mission Inn Avenue,
Riverside CA 92501

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dtpc@pacbell.net

<http://www.tortoise-tracks.org>

Center for Biological Diversity:

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(520) 623-5252 x306

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Las Vegas, NV 89109
(702) 413-1517

cristi@greatbasinminewatch.org

Greenheart:

Terry Christopher, 5883 Stoneborough,
Las Vegas, NV 89113
(702) 378-0388

tectort@aol.com

Desert Tortoise Council Awards

Annual Award	Matthew Brooks
Special Award	Rhys Evans
Special Award	William Quillman
Special Award	Peter Woodman
Service Award	Cheryl Darnell
Service Award	Ed Larue
Service Award	Justin Neighbor
Service Award	Pat von Helf
Service Award	Marc D. Graff

From 2003, presented in 2004:
Special Award **Anders G. J. Rhodin**

Best Student Paper **Kenneth E. Nussear**
Can Modeling of Tortoise Activity Be Used to Improve Species Monitoring? University of Nevada, Reno; Advisor Dr. C. Richard Tracy

Best Student Poster **Denim M. Jochimsen**
Road Mortality of Snakes on the Eastern Snake River Plain. Idaho State University, Pocatello; Advisor Dr. Charles R. Peterson

Photo Contest

The results from the photo contest are in! Competition was fierce because there were numerous entries this year- probably because digital cameras have gotten cheaper and printing digital photos in a larger format is easier than dealing with photo prints. Each first place winner took home \$50 and the Best of Show won \$100.00.

Wild Desert Tortoises

Ellen Schafhauser, Mir Velten, Dave Focardi
Captive Pet Tortoises

Matt McMillan, Shelley Ellis, (tie) Cheryl Darnell & Darlene Pond

Other Desert Reptiles

Dave Focardi, Bridget Kobe Clayton, Dave Focardi

Desert Mammals

Dave Silverman, (tie) Ryan Hewitt & Dave Silverman

Other Desert Wildlife

Charlene Burge, Chereka Keaton, Ryan Hewitt

Wild Desert Plants

Ellen Schafhauser, Dave Silverman, Ryan Hewitt

Desert Scenics

Charlene Burge, Dave Silverman, (tie) Shelley Ellis & Daren Riedle

Tortoise Conservation

Dave Focardi, Matt McMillan, Dave Silverman

Best of Show

Dave Focardi, for his photo of a long-nosed leopard lizard, looking into the camera

The winning photographs will be posted on the web page later. Some of the entries may be viewed at: <http://deserttortoise.org/symposium/2004/photo2004entries.html>



DAVID MORAFKA

David Joseph Morafka, a long-time member and participant of the Desert Tortoise Council, died January 13, 2004, at the age of 57, after a valiant battle with pancreatic cancer. He is survived by his beloved wife of almost 10 years, Sylvia; his step-son, Christopher John Papadakos; and his uncle and aunt, Daniel and Roberta Morafka.

David Morafka received a bachelors degree with honors in zoology in 1967 from the University of California at Berkeley, followed by a doctoral degree in biology from the University of Southern California in 1974. His academic career began in 1972 at California State University, Dominguez Hills, and continued until a few years ago. He was appointed a Research Fellow at the Royal Ontario Museum, Toronto, Canada. In 2002, he became a Research Associate at the California Academy of Sciences in San Francisco, and moved his residence to the Bay Area.

Dr. Morafka's career interests in science were broad. One of his early publications was a book, *A Biogeographic Analysis of the Chihuahuan Desert through its Herpetofauna*. The book was followed by grants from the Instituto de Ecologia and National Science Foundation to pursue research on origins, divergence, and differentiation of North American deserts as evidenced by the herpetofaunal relationships. Throughout his life, he maintained a strong interest in reptiles and at the time of his death, was actively engaged in research on the Panamint alligator lizard and fringe-toed lizards.

Dr. Morafka's involvement with the Desert Tortoise Council began in the late 1970s with presentations on the ecogeography, life history, reproduction, conservation, and husbandry of the bolson tortoise (*Gopherus flavomarginatus*). His research with bolson tortoises was supported by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, National Science Foundation, and Instituto de Ecologia. Numerous publications in such journals as *Annals*

of the Carnegie Museum of Natural History and *Vida Silvestre Neotropical* resulted with both Mexican and American colleagues. In 1988, Dr. Morafka's interests expanded to include neonatology of desert tortoises. Supported by the National Training Center, Fort Irwin, and Southern California Edison, Dr. Morafka developed a multi-disciplinary research program on neonate desert tortoises with colleagues and students. Dr. Morafka established relationships and published many papers with colleagues during this period—Gustavo Aguirre, Bob Murphy, Ken Nagy, Kristin Berry, Olav Oftedal, Becky Yates, Dawn Wilson, E. Karen Spangenberg, Lisa Hazard, and many others.

Dr. Morafka played a major role in science-based publications and only a few of many contributions are noted here. Between 1990 and 1994, he was active on the first desert tortoise Recovery Team, which resulted in the 1994 publication of the *Desert Tortoise (Mojave Population) Recovery Plan*. In 1994 he was appointed to the editorial board of *Chelonian Conservation and Biology*, and organized a symposium on Reptile Neonatology for the Third World Congress of Herpetology, which was held in Prague in 1997. Parts of two issues of *Herpetological Monographs* (2000-2001) represent the papers offered at the symposium on reptilian neonatology. He was also a major contributor to the *Gopherus* volume of *Chelonian Conservation and Biology* in 2002. Dr. Morafka was honored by the Desert Tortoise Council for his numerous contributions in 2002 with its highest award, the Annual Award.

During the last few years, Dr. Morafka worked on papers about the effects of military maneuvers on lizard populations at Fort Irwin. He was hoping to edit and contribute to a special volume of *Journal of Arid Environments* on the Mojave Desert, primarily composed of research projects supported by the Department of Defense. Kristin Berry and Bob Murphy are completing this effort in a volume dedicated to him.

At the Desert Tortoise Council's Annual Meeting and Symposium on February 20, 2004, a Celebration of Life was held in memory of David J. Morafka. Many friends, colleagues, and former students reminisced about his generosity, stimulating and articulate conversations, travels, and scientific collaborations for almost three hours. David Morafka had a unique ability to bring diverse interests together and to synthesize and express important concepts. He was a much loved and highly regarded man and scientist, and many feel a tremendous loss with his death.

2002/2003 PROCEEDINGS AVAILABLE

The Symposium Proceedings for the 2002 and annual symposium have been published as a single volume. The cost is \$10 for members and \$16 for non-members. Ordering information is available on our web page. Because of declining sales and fewer papers being submitted, this could possibly be the last printed proceedings volume. The Board is exploring other options for the symposium proceedings.

30TH ANNUAL SYMPOSIUM IN TUCSON IN 2005

The Annual Symposium will return to Tucson for the 30th meeting. The Board is planning some special events, but if you have any suggestions on how to make the 30th Symposium a special one, please pass them along. The Symposium will be held at the Radisson Hotel City Center, in downtown, 15 minutes from the airport, and 0.1 miles from Interstate 10. Tucson is also an easy 2-hour drive from the Phoenix airport.

The local host committee is being formed, special sessions are being planned, and special speakers

and authors are being sought. **Plan on being in Tucson in February, 2005!**

Hotel information can be found at:

<http://radisson.com/tucsonaz>

and information on Tucson can be found at:

<http://www.visittucson.org>

GALÁPAGOS 2004: August 5 - 18

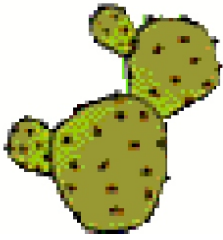
Come join Maggie Fusari for a 13-day cruise in the Galápagos Islands and retrace Darwin's travels. Last chance this year to take advantage of this opportunity! As DTC members you enjoy a reduced trip cost of \$3550 plus airfare AND DTC gets a \$200 donation for each member who goes. You need to meet the giant tortoises (including Lonesome George) and the marine and land iguanas. You will see wonderful seabirds, feeding and nesting and flying all around you. You will get up close and personal with the Darwin's finches. You will visit northern, southern, and western islands. Last year we saw a pod of Orca feeding on a whale! We usually see many dolphins and the snorkling is excellent.

Maggie is a long time DTC member and has been going to the Galápagos for almost 10 years. She knows the animals and plants, the history of evolutionary study on Galápagos, and the current status of the islands well.

The goal is to fill the trip by early January. So log on to the website (<http://www.galapagostravel.com>), see the pictures and maps, read the details of payments, refunds, insurance, etc., and then call and make your reservation. E-mail Maggie if you have questions: fusari@ucsc.edu.

SIGN UP NOW!!

www.deserttortoise.org



CONSERVATION NEWS

2004 FEDERAL GRAZING FEE ANNOUNCED

The grazing fee for Western public lands administered by the Bureau of Land Management and the USDA Forest Service will be \$1.43 per animal unit month in 2004, up a whopping eight cents from \$1.35 in 2003. The newly adjusted fee, which takes affect March 1, applies to more than 18,000 grazing permits and leases administered by the BLM and more than 8,000 permits administered by the Forest Service.

The formula used for calculating the grazing fee, established by Congress in the 1978 Public Rangelands Improvement Act, has continued under a presidential Executive Order issued in 1986. An animal unit month, or AUM, is the amount of forage needed to sustain one cow and her calf, one horse, or five sheep or goats for a month. Under the 1986 Executive Order, the grazing fee cannot fall below \$1.35 per AUM.

The annually adjusted grazing fee is computed by using a 1966 base value of \$1.23 per AUM for livestock grazing on public lands in Western states. The figure is then adjusted according to three factors - current private grazing land lease rates, beef cattle prices, and the cost of livestock production. Based on the formula, the 2004 fee rose primarily because of an increase in beef cattle prices in 2003.

The \$1.43 per AUM grazing fee applies to 16 states in the western half of the nation on public lands administered by the BLM and the Forest Service. The states are Arizona, California, Colorado, Idaho, Kansas, Montana, Nebraska,

Nevada, New Mexico, North Dakota, Oklahoma, Oregon, South Dakota, Utah, Washington, and Wyoming.

* * * * *

ADMINISTRATION CUTS FUNDING FOR ENDANGERED SPECIES

President Bush recently talked about the government's new Landowner Incentive Program, which offers \$26 million in grants to private landowners to protect habitat for at-risk species. But that good news is offset by the fact that his recent budget proposal slashes funding for endangered species recovery by almost \$10 million -- putting it at its lowest level since the president took office. While the involvement of private landowners is necessary to save many species, it is not as important as the endangered species program itself. Environmentalists have accused the Bush administration of putting the public good -- along with 1,263 threatened or endangered plants and animals -- at increased risk in an attempt to further line the pockets of a privileged few. "The Bush administration is playing a shell game with funding," said NRDC's budget analyst, Wesley Warren. "The losers of this game are the vast majority of America's imperiled wildlife."

http://www.nrdc.org/bushrecord/wildlife_species.asp#1451

* * * * *

PROPOSED HYUNDAI TEST TRACK

The Center for Biological Diversity and Defenders of Wildlife filed a lawsuit against the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) over permits issued to Hyundai Motor Company and California City to build an automotive test track in some of California's most beautiful and wild desert lands. The project would result in the destruction and degradation of nearly 4,500 acres of high quality desert that are home to several threatened species,

including the Mojave ground squirrel and desert tortoise.

"The Bush administration is jeopardizing endangered species by unwisely rushing construction permits before securing conservation lands," said Daniel R. Patterson, Ecologist with the Center for Biological Diversity. "It's unacceptable that Interior Secretary Norton is permitting Hyundai to take 54 desert tortoises -- this would be a severe impact to the endangered and crashing West Mojave population."

"The construction of this test track will devastate some of California's most pristine desert wildlands and will destroy the habitat of many of our state's threatened species. We believe the Fish and Wildlife Service violated federal environmental law when it approved this project without full analysis of the effect it would have on our lands and the species that inhabit them," stated Kim Delfino, California Program Director for Defenders of Wildlife.

The area designated for construction encompasses 4,500 acres near California City. The desert tortoise that inhabits this area is a large, herbivorous reptile that has been devastated by habitat loss and disease. The FWS and tortoise experts spent four years developing a strong Desert Tortoise Recovery Plan, but federal agencies have not fully implemented the plan and the tortoise remains threatened.

The FWS approved the destruction of 4,500 acres of habitat and the "incidental take" of up to 54 tortoises in exchange for the future purchase of 3,200 acres of "compensation lands," but that land has not yet been identified. The FWS acknowledges that since the "compensation" lands may not provide adequate habitat for tortoises, a contingency plan must be developed at some time in the future, but details of that plan have yet to be developed as well.

Hibernating tortoises within the construction zone are currently being taken out of their burrows and boxed into on-site artificial burrows while they wait for translocation to an as-yet-to-be-determined location in early April. This handling of tortoises stresses the animals, increasing the chances of illness and death. While up to 20 tortoises may be removed from this project area, an unknown number of juveniles and eggs are likely to be destroyed because they are nearly impossible to locate during hibernation. This is particularly concerning because 2003 was a good reproductive year and numerous juveniles will likely not be detected before they are crushed by construction.

Although the eventual translocation site has not been finalized, the preferred site is located within an area of desert tortoise critical habitat where experimental translocations are prohibited by the Desert Tortoise Recovery Plan. "Translocation plans for desert tortoise have notoriously low rates of success due to the increased spread of disease and other factors," stated Cynthia Wilkerson, California Species Associate for Defenders of Wildlife. "The approved translocation plan is admittedly an experiment and threatens not only the tortoises that will be moved, but those that currently live in and around the translocation site."

<http://biologicaldiversity.org/swcbd/press/hyundi2-23-04.htm>

* * * * *

NEVADA FEDERAL LAND SALE

The U.S. District Court for the District of Nevada has ruled against the Bureau of Land Management on a plan to dispose of thousands of acres of public land in eastern Nevada, in occupied desert tortoise habitat. In a ruling filed on March 22, 2004 the Court found in favor of plaintiffs Western Land Exchange Project, Committee for the High Desert, and Center for Biological Diversity.

www.deserttortoise.org

BLM had scheduled to offer again for competitive sale more than 6,000 acres of BLM-administered public lands in southern Lincoln County in August 2004. The BLM is mandated by Congress, under the Lincoln County Land Act (LCLA) of 2000, to offer for competitive bid 13,500 acres of public lands in southern Lincoln County by October 2005.

The land disposal was authorized by the Lincoln County Land Act. The LCLA authorized the BLM to sell a total of 13,000 acres of federal land in Lincoln County, Nevada—northeast of Las Vegas and just north of Mesquite—over five years.

The Court held that BLM violated the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) by:

- neglecting to analyze the impact of pulling water from nearby basins to supply development of the federal land;
- failing to develop mitigation plans sufficient to protect five threatened and endangered species;
- ignoring the cumulative impacts of the LCLA combined with other planned development for the region— additional land privatization, a power plant, and a new Mesquite regional airport. Together, the actions would open more than 36,000 acres to development and would support 200,000 people in the Mesquite area.

The decision prohibits BLM from further attempts to sell the lands until the agency has prepared an environmental impact statement addressing the issues raised by the plaintiffs. It is not common for a judge to say an EIS is needed- that is the function of an environmental assessment.

“BLM acts as though its role is to expedite the rapid development of southeastern Nevada, but this decision says that's not the case. Development can't go forward until the BLM takes an honest look at its consequences,” said attorney Christopher Krupp.

The issues of development and water use in Lincoln County are about to become even more critical: a new plan is underway to build enormous pipelines to deliver water from the rural county to Las Vegas. As part of the same plan, Nevada Senator Harry Reid is formulating legislation that would privatize an additional 80,000 acres in Lincoln County. Experts admit that actual water availability remains an unanswered question. This area is also occupied by desert tortoises.

<http://biologicaldiversity.org/swcbd/press/nevada3-24-04.htm>

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FUTURE ANNUAL SYMPOSIA

Suggestions or bids for future symposia locations and venues will be gratefully accepted. Can someone come up with a new city or venue that meets our needs?

2006: Tucson

2007: Proposals/suggestions being accepted.

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Note: Prices include postage and handling for up to five volumes. Please add \$1.00 per copy for each additional volume over five. U.S. drafts only. Proceedings will be delivered in four to six weeks.

Make check payable to the Desert Tortoise Council and mail with your order to:
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These proceedings record the papers presented at the annual symposium of the Desert Tortoise Council. The Council, however, does not necessarily endorse the conclusions reached in the papers, nor can it attest to the validity or accuracy of the data.

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