



THE DESERT TORTOISE COUNCIL NEWSLETTER

SPRING 2005
OUR 31ST YEAR

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

2005 ANNUAL SYMPOSIUM RECAP

The 30th Annual Desert Tortoise Council Symposium was held in Tucson February 18 to 21, 2005. The Annual Business Meeting kicked off the weekend's events.

The 30th Anniversary Symposium had some of the usual happenings: plenty of presentations on desert tortoise research and management, invited speakers, awards, vendors, and scads of networking! Presentation highlights included the keynote address by the 2005 DTC Research Award Winner, **Dr. Olav Oftedal**; **Dr. Ray Turner** spoke about his books The Changing Mile and The Changing Mile Revisited; and Mexican biologists **Christina Melendez Torres** and **Martin Villa Andrade** talked about the desert tortoise in Sonora.

Other talks and sessions included recovery actions, status and trends of southwestern chelonians, Sonoran Desert tortoises, bafflegrass, Bolson tortoises, health and disease, non-profit organizations, tent tortoises, genetics, and Department of Defense supported research.

At the banquet, **Dr. Peter Pritchard** spoke about Pinta Island tortoises. Dr. Stebbins' painting,

"Guardian of the West Mojave," was auctioned as a silent auction item. This is the second year in a row that Dr. Stebbins has donated the proceeds of the auction to the Council. A birthday cake to honor Dr. Stebbins' 90th birthday was enjoyed by all. In addition to the raffle and auction, the annual Desert Tortoise Council Awards were presented.

Friday evening saw a no host mixer and social, with authors Ray Turner and **Jan Bowers** signing The Changing Mile Revisited. Also signing their books were Dr. Stebbins and Dr. Pritchard.

Commemorative 30th Symposium folders, pens, calendars, shirts, and Chum's name tag holders helped add special touches to the 30th Annual Symposium. Special thanks go to **Cheryl Darnell** and **Tracy Bailey** for putting together the calendar, **Darlene Pond** for the pens, **Bob Parker** for designing the shirt, and **Tom Ferries** of Chums, Ltd. for donating the name tag holders.

A field trip to Saguaro National Park, led by **Don Swann**, **Daren Riedle**, and **Erin Zylstra** capped off the symposium weekend.

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

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

Vendors and Exhibitors

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Desert Tortoise Council

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Rincon Institute

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Desert Tortoise Natural Area and Desert Tortoise Preserve Committee

Mike Connor, Desert Tortoise Preserve
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dtpc@pacbell.net

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

Hahn's Natural History Books

Donald Hahn, P.O. Box 1004,

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Sky Island Alliance

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Tucson Herpetological Society

P.O. Box 709, Tucson, AZ 85702-0709

Young Cage, President

Ydcage@aol.com (520) 579-2223

<http://tucsonherpsociety.org>

Photo Contest Winners

Each first place winner took home \$50 and the Best of Show won \$100.00.

Wild Desert Tortoises

Mark Bratton

Captive (Pet) Desert Tortoises

Ellen Schafhauser

Other Desert Reptiles

Bridget Clayton

Desert Mammals

Charlene Burge

Other Desert Wildlife

G. Walker Johnson

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Wild Desert Plants **Ellen Schafhauser**
Desert Scenics **Charlene Burge**
Tortoise Conservation **Dave Focardi**

Best of Show:

Charlene Burge for Desert Scenics
(sand dunes)

Desert Tortoise Council Awards

Annual Award **Kristin H. Berry**
Annual Award **Glenn R. Stewart**
Research Award **Olaf T. Oftedal**
Special Award **Betty L. Burge**
Special Award **Jun Y. Lee**
Service Award **Doug Duncan**
Service Award **Tracy Bailey**
Service Award **Allan Muth**
Best Student Paper Award **Bridgette E. Hagerty**
University of Nevada, Reno for her paper entitled:
"Preserving the Diversity of the Desert Tortoise
(*Gopherus agassizii*): Reassessing Conservation
Units."

**The Current Board of Directors of the
Desert Tortoise Council**

Senior Co-Chair Doug Duncan
Junior Co-Chair Pete Woodman
Co-Chair Elect Dan Pearson
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Treasurer Mike Coffeen
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**DAVID J. MORAFKA
MEMORIAL SCHOLARSHIP**



In honor and memory of Dr. David J. Morafka, distinguished herpetologist and authority on North American gopher tortoises, the Desert Tortoise Council, with the aid of several donors, has established a scholarship to help support graduate student research that contributes to the understanding, management, and conservation of the desert tortoise, *Gopherus agassizii*.

The scholarship amount of \$2,000 will be awarded at the Desert Tortoise Council's Annual Symposium, depending on the availability of funding and an appropriate recipient.

To be eligible applicants must be graduate students enrolled in a Master's or Doctoral program at an accredited university. They must agree to present a report on the results of the research in which scholarship funds were used at a future symposium of the Desert Tortoise Council.

Applications will be evaluated on the potential of the research to contribute to the biological knowledge of the desert tortoise, and to its management and conservation. Essential conditions are the importance and originality of the research problem, design of sampling and analysis, preliminary data supporting the feasibility of the research, and the likelihood of success.

Application Procedure:

1. Download an application form.
<http://deserttortoise.org/awards/morafkascholarship.pdf>

2. Provide all information requested on the application, including a description of the research project in no more than 1,200 words.
3. Applications must be accompanied by three letters of recommendation, one of which must be from the applicant's major professor or research advisor. The letters must be in sealed envelopes addressed to the "Morafka Scholarship Selection Committee" with the recommenders' signatures across the flaps.
4. Completed application materials must be submitted by November 1, 2005, to the Desert Tortoise Council, P. O. Box 5685, Sun City West, AZ 85376-5685.
5. A scholarship recipient will be selected by a committee of Desert Tortoise biologists appointed by the Desert Tortoise Council Board of Directors.
6. The scholarship recipient will be notified of their award by February 1, 2006, and the award will be presented at the 2006 Desert Tortoise Council Symposium.

CONSERVATION NEWS

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Long-Awaited West Mojave Conservation Plan Released

The West Mojave Plan, the largest habitat conservation plan (HCP) ever developed in the United States, encompasses 9.3 million acres in San Bernardino, Kern, Los Angeles, and Inyo counties. It has been jointly released, along with the Final Environmental Impact Statement and Environmental Impact Report (EIS/EIR), by the U.S. Bureau of Land Management (BLM), the County of San Bernardino, and the City of Barstow.

The HCP and proposed BLM plan amendment are intended to provide a comprehensive strategy to conserve and protect more than 100 listed or sensitive wildlife species and their habitats, including the desert tortoise and Mohave ground squirrel. The plan also provides a streamlined program for public agencies and private parties to comply with requirements of the State and Federal Endangered Species Acts. In addition to being a multi-agency HCP, it is also an amendment to the 1980 California Desert Conservation Area (CDCA) Plan and includes a final EIS/EIR analyzing the impacts of the plan's provisions.

In addition to BLM, San Bernardino County, and Barstow, many other entities cooperated or participated in the plan's development, including three other counties, 10 other cities, the California Department of Fish and Game, the California Department of Transportation, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, four U.S. military bases, and numerous non-governmental organizations and businesses.

Notice of availability of the West Mojave proposed plan/HCP and final EIS was published in the Federal Register April 1, 2005. As part of the Federal approval process, all those who participated in the plan development and commented on the draft, issued for public review in June 2003, can protest the plan to BLM's Director. A 30-day public protest period will end May 2, 2005. Protests must be submitted to the U.S. Department of the Interior, Director, Bureau of Land Management (210), Attn: Brenda Williams, P.O. Box 66538, Washington, D.C. 20240 (regular mail) or 1620 L Street, NW, Room 1075, Washington, D.C. 20036 (overnight mail). Procedures for filing a protest are clearly outlined in the front of the document. After the BLM's final action, the County of San Bernardino and the City of Barstow will hold noticed public hearings to consider certification of the EIR and adoption of the conservation program.

Announcements of the availability of the document are being provided to agencies and all those who commented on the draft plan/HCP. The document is available online at <http://www.ca.blm.gov>.

The West Mojave Plan/HCP is the last of five regional plan amendments to the 1980 CDCA Plan that, desert-wide, are supposed to provide comprehensive management, not only for the protection and recovery of the desert tortoise and other listed species, but for hundreds of other sensitive plant and animal species to reduce the need for future listings. The West Mojave Plan, in conjunction with the other four plan amendments (Northern and Eastern Colorado Desert, Northern and Eastern Mojave, Coachella Valley, Western Colorado Desert), also completes route designation throughout the California Desert Conservation Area, as required in the 1980 CDCA Plan.

<http://www.ca.blm.gov/cdd/wemo.html>

BLM rolls out management plans for California desert

After an injunction issued by Judge Susan Illston on Dec. 30, 2004, prohibiting OHV use in wash zones within the 571,000 acres, the BLM consulted with the FWS. The FWS determined that the BLM proposal would not jeopardize the desert tortoise, nor adversely modify its critical habitat. So, the BLM has opened desert washes to off-road travel on 571,000 acres in Imperial, Riverside, and San Bernardino counties.

Also, on March 24, BLM released a Record of Decision on the Algodones (Imperial) Sand Dunes Recreation Management Plan (RAMP). The RAMP allows ORV use with restrictions on 33,000 acres of 49,300 acres of the Algodones Dunes that had been closed under a court-approved settlement agreement.

Closures on the 49,300 acres will remain in place until October. Judge Illston has scheduled a hearing for Sept. 15.

The Dunes can be used by 200,000 or more off-roaders on a single weekend. Off-road vehicles at the Algodones Dunes include sand rails, motorcycles, trucks, and ATVs whose tires cut deeply into the sand habitat, even when accelerating on level ground (Stebbins 1995).

There are many rare and imperiled species on the Dunes: Peirson's milkvetch, desert tortoise, Algodones Dunes sunflower, flat-tailed horned lizard, burrowing owl, and Andrew's dunes scarab beetle.

Dunes are hotspots of biological diversity, likely because they are more mesic than other desert habitats due to their ability to store water. The Algodones Dunes are no exception, harboring dozens of rare endemic wildlife and plants within its habitat island. Animal species endemic to the Algodones Dunes are adapted to the hot, arid Sonoran Desert environment and often exhibit habitat specialization, such as dependence upon a particular host plant.

Peptide from Tarantula Venom Shows Promise as Treatment for Muscular Dystrophy, Incontinence, Atrial Fibrillation

Little Miss Muffet probably would not sit on a tuffet in Frederick Sachs' lab, even if he had such a seat. He keeps spiders there. Tarantulas, to be exact.

Sachs and his colleagues in the Center for Single Molecule Biophysics in the University at Buffalo's School of Medicine and Biomedical Sciences have isolated a peptide from tarantula venom that shows promise as a therapy for conditions as disparate as

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muscular dystrophy, cardiac arrhythmias, and urinary incontinence.

The researchers discovered the peptide, purified it, and changed its structure to its mirror image to prevent it from being destroyed by stomach enzymes or the immune system. Their most recent research results were published in July in the journal Nature. Earlier findings were published in Nature and the Journal of General Physiology. They now will study ways to turn the peptide into treatments for specific disorders.

The novel peptide from tarantula venom, labeled GsMTx4, is the only agent known to block pores in cell membranes called mechanosensitive ion channels. "These are the transducers that turn mechanical stress into cellular signals," said Sachs. "They are familiar to us as the sensors for hearing and touch. However, they also have been implicated in biological functions as diverse as muscle coordination, blood pressure, and volume regulation.

Fifth World Congress of Herpetology

19 – 24 June 2005

Stellenbosch, South Africa

Program Update and Call for Registration

Final arrangements for the Fifth World Congress of Herpetology, scheduled for 19 to 24 June, 2005, at the University of Stellenbosch, Stellenbosch, South Africa have been made and registration is now open. The task by the Congress Organizer regarding the organization of the Congress is completed and the Local Organizing Committee has taken over the final stage leading up to the event. Please direct any enquiries to Ernst Baard at baarde@cncjnk.wcape.gov.za

SYMPOSIUM PROCEEDINGS

Because of declining submissions of papers, increasing costs, and declining sales, the Executive Board has decided to cease publishing a symposium proceedings. If authors that presented a paper at the annual symposium wish to publish an extended abstract or paper on the Council's web page, they should contact the Publishing and Editing Committee (Doug Duncan, fldhcky@cox.net).

FUND FOR WILD NATURE OFFERS SUPPORT FOR ENVIRONMENTAL ACTION

The Portland, Oregon-based Fund for Wild Nature (<http://fundwildnature.org/>) provides money for campaigns designed to save and restore native species and wild ecosystems, including actions to defend wilderness and biological diversity.

Advocacy, litigation, public policy work, development of citizen science, and similar endeavors are eligible for funding. They do not fund basic scientific research, private land acquisition, individual action or study, or conferences. Only media projects that have a clear strategic value and a concrete plan for dissemination of the final product can be funded.

The Fund for Wild Nature supports biocentric goals that are premised on effective and intelligible strategies. They give special attention to ecological issues not currently receiving sufficient public attention and funding. They seek proposals with visionary and yet realistic goals to create tangible change. All proposals must be highly cost effective. They rarely fund proposals from organizations with annual budgets greater than \$250,000. Because proposals are reviewed by individuals who are very familiar with a wide range of conservation issues, we encourage

applicants to be concise in their summary of the problem at hand and focus on what the organization plans to do and why you think your strategy will be successful.

The Fund for Wild Nature only funds projects in the United States, Canada, and Mexico. No individual or organization may receive more than one grant per calendar year. Similarly, proposals from groups or individuals with existing grants will not be considered until the active grant is completed.

PATAGONIA'S ENVIRONMENTAL GRANTS PROGRAM

Patagonia (<http://www.patagonia.com/>), a privately held outdoor clothing and gear company, provides support for environmental work through grants to nonprofits.

Patagonia's Environmental Grants Program funds environmental work that is: action-oriented, builds public involvement and support, is strategic, focuses on root causes, accomplishes specific goals and objectives, and takes place in communities in which the company does business.

The company does not fund: general environmental education efforts; research, unless it is in direct support of a developed plan for specific action to alleviate an environmental problem; land acquisition/land trusts/conservation easements; endowment funds; political campaigns; or organizations without 501(c)(3) status.

The company seeks to support small, grassroots activist organizations with provocative direct-action agendas. Most grants will be in the range of \$3,000 to \$8,000.

Proposals for Patagonia's Environmental Grants Program will be accepted during the months of April and August. Visit the Patagonia web site for complete program information and application procedures.

NOW AVAILABLE

Regional-Scale Estimation of Density and Habitat Use of the desert tortoise (*Gopherus agassizii*) in Arizona, by Roy C. Averill-Murray and Annalaura Averill-Murray, in the Journal of Herpetology, Volume 39, No. 1, pp. 65–72, 2005.

1ST CALL FOR PAPERS – MANAGING WILDLIFE IN THE SOUTHWEST: NEW CHALLENGES FOR THE 21ST CENTURY

This is a first call for papers for the upcoming meeting of the Southwest Section of TWS. This professional meeting will be held at Sul Ross State University in Alpine, Texas, 9 to 11 August, 2005. Professional wildlife biologists and wildlife students from Arizona, New Mexico, and Texas, as well as Northern Mexico, will gather for the first major Southwest Section of TWS meeting in 15 years. An edited symposium proceedings will be published and provided to all registered meeting participants. Information will be available on the meeting, as well as the on-line abstract submission guidelines at:

www.swtws.org

<http://apc.tamu.edu/twsabstracts/>

If you have additional questions contact the Program Chair at:

Scott P. Lerich

National Wild Turkey Federation

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lerichnwtf@sbcglobal.net

All papers dealing with wildlife management in the southwestern United States and northern Mexico are encouraged, including the results of wildlife field investigations and analyses, as well as topic reviews of interest to wildlife students and professionals in the southwest. **Deadline for receipt of abstracts is 11 June, 2005.**

Desert Tortoise Council
c/o Doug Duncan
P.O. Box 331
Tucson, AZ 85702

Check one: MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION/RENEWAL CHANGE OF ADDRESS
DATE: _____ EMAIL ADDRESS: _____
NAME: _____ PHONE: _____
(Please Print) (Include Area Code)
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Regular (\$15.00 per year) Organization (\$55.00 per year)
 Contributing (\$50.00 per year) Lifetime (\$300 or more)
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NEWSLETTER FORMAT:
 Mailed paper copy Pdf file via e-mail E-mail notice for web page viewing

Make check or money order payable to the Desert Tortoise Council
and **send** with this application

to: **Desert Tortoise Council, P.O. Box 5685**
Sun City West, AZ 85376-5685

The Desert Tortoise Council does not release its membership list

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