



THE DESERT TORTOISE COUNCIL NEWSLETTER

FALL 2006
OUR 31ST YEAR

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

15th ANNUAL SURVEYING, MONITORING, AND HANDLING TECHNIQUES WORKSHOP

November 4-5, 2006, Ridgecrest, California

The 15th Annual Surveying, Monitoring, and Handling Techniques Workshop is scheduled for November 4 and 5, 2006 at the Carriage Inn in Ridgecrest, California. **The workshop is full!** If you are on the list to attend and have not received the registration link, please contact us. You will have three weeks to send in your registration and full payment. After that, we will be contacting people on the waiting list. If you would like to be placed on the waiting list, please contact Tracy or Mike Bailey at tracy.bailey@mchsi.com.

The DTC Tortoise Handling Workshops are recognized by the USFWS and CDFG, but a certificate of attendance and participation **does**

not guarantee a USFWS or CDFG permit. However, completion of the Workshop should assist with obtaining the permits.

The Desert Tortoise Council's two-day workshops are structured to provide information on the handling, monitoring, surveying, and biology of desert tortoises. Instructors include: Desert Tortoise Council officers, public and private sector biologists, and personnel from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), Bureau of Land Management (BLM), California Department of Fish and Game (CDFG), and Arizona Game and Fish Department. Last minute registrations at Ridgecrest will not be accepted, as we are a nonprofit organization trying to make the registration process fair and easy for everyone involved.

2007 ANNUAL SYMPOSIUM LAS VEGAS

The Desert Tortoise Council Symposium will be held in Las Vegas for 2007 and 2008. Sam's Town will be hosting the event from February 23 to 26, 2007. We will make available many of the details on this upcoming symposium in the winter newsletter. We look forward to sharing this information with you then.

Because of the positive feedback we received regarding the Saturday evening event, we will again be having a mixer only, with no banquet, followed by awards, raffle, and auction. We will also do our best to have the Saturday evening program finish as early as possible.

Registration fee structure has changed slightly. The fee structure makes it even more attractive to members, and to register early. Student registration remains the same. We have also added spouse registration, which includes breakfasts and socials.

Sam's Town has reserved a block of rooms from February 22 to 26, 2007. The room rate is \$45 for Thursday and Sunday, and \$99.99 a night for Friday and Saturday. Reservation information will be posted on our web page when we receive it and in future newsletters. Refer to the Sam's Town web page for additional information:

<http://www.samstowntlv.com/main.cfm>

and information on Las Vegas can be found at:

<http://www.visitlasvegas.com/vegas/>

Both individual or group donations for the symposium are greatly appreciated and can be made by contacting Bob Turner, local host chair, at KKBK@cox.net.

PHOTO CONTEST HELP NEEDED

The DTC is looking for someone interested in running the photo contest at the upcoming February Symposium. The person(s) will be responsible for setting up the displays, counting the votes, and announcing the winners during the Saturday night program. If you are interested, please contact Tracy Bailey at tracy.bailey@mchsi.com.

REGISTRATIONS INSIDE THIS ISSUE

You must register to attend. Preregistration as a member is the best value. The deadline for early registration is January 15, 2007.

THE CURRENT BOARD OF DIRECTORS OF THE DESERT TORTOISE COUNCIL

Senior Co-Chair	Pete Woodman
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REGISTRATION FORM

Desert Tortoise Council 32nd Annual Meeting and Symposium February 23-26, 2007

Return to
Desert Tortoise Council
P.O. Box 331
Tucson, AZ 85702-331

Please complete a SEPARATE form for each attendee.
Please print or type

Name: _____ **Organization:** _____
(First, Last) (Name to be used on ID badges)

Address: _____ **City:** _____ **State:** _____ **Zip:** _____

E-mail: _____ **Daytime Phone:** _____ **Fax:** _____

SYMPOSIUM FEES

		ENTER AMOUNT
Member Registration	\$90.00 (\$125.00 if postmarked after 1/14/2007)	_____
Student Member Registration	\$40.00 (verification required) (\$65.00 if postmarked after 1/14/2007)	_____
Non-member Registration	\$110.00 (\$145.00 if postmarked after 1/14/2007)	_____
One-day Registration	\$75 member/ \$95 non-member/Day	_____
Spouses (inc. breakfasts/socials)	\$40	_____
Regular Membership Dues	\$15.00 (see dues schedule in a newsletter)	_____
Raffle Ticket(s)	@ \$1.00 each	_____
	TOTAL ENCLOSED	_____

Makes check payable to **Desert Tortoise Council**
Only checks or fully executed purchase orders are accepted
There will be a \$25 service fee for registrations cancelled after January 1, 2007

Monday Field Trip
I would like to attend one of several Monday, February 26, 2007, field trips
Yes: _____ No: _____

www.deserttortoise.org

**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*.

Scholarship Amount: \$2,000 to be awarded at the Desert Tortoise Council's Annual Symposium, depending on the availability of funding and an appropriate recipient.

Eligibility: 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 Desert Tortoise Council symposium.

Evaluation Criteria: Applications will be evaluated on the basis of the potential of the research to contribute to the biological knowledge of the desert tortoise, and to its management and conservation. Important considerations 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. Obtain an application form from the Desert Tortoise Council's website (www.deserttortoise.org).
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 flap.

4. Completed application materials must be submitted by **December 1, 2006** to the **Desert Tortoise Council, P. O. Box 3273, Beaumont, CA 92223**.

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, 2007** and the award will be presented at the 2007 Desert Tortoise Council Symposium.

FUTURE ANNUAL SYMPOSIA

The symposium's location for 2008 will be Sam's Town in Las Vegas on February 22 to 25. Suggestions or bids for future symposia locations and venues will be gratefully accepted. The Board of Directors is researching St. George, Mesquite, Phoenix, and Laughlin.

CONSERVATION NEWS

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**Sonora, Mexico Desert Tortoise
Research Project**

Thanks to the DTC, the Royal Ontario Museum, and funding from our volunteer field crew, it was yet another amazing and successful trip to study tortoises in Mexico this fall. Our field team comprised 12 US volunteers, 5 personnel from

BLM Grazing Regulations

Comisión de Ecología y Desarrollo Sustentable del Estado de Sonora (CEDES), 2 from the Reserve (Área de Flora y Fauna Sierra de Alamos – Rio Cuchujaqui), and several locals from Alamos and Hermosillo ranches.

In September two teams traveled to Sonora to continue the research we started in November of 2005. One crew traveled to the tropical deciduous forest (TDF) near Alamos to conduct behavioral and dietary studies on the 19 tortoises we attached telemetry units to last year. It was certainly different from last November as the TDF was at its greenest. Watching tortoises poses a much greater challenge in the TDF this time of year than it does in the wide-open Mojave Desert. We'll have to show folks some comparison photos at the next Symposium in Las Vegas!

A second crew of biologists traveled to the Hermosillo region to search for tortoises on ranches in central Sonora. Record precipitation made finding tortoises a challenge, but even though the annual vegetation was over a foot tall on the two ranches we worked on the tortoises couldn't escape our experienced sleuths. We found 17 animals and were able to collect blood samples for genetics and disease studies as well as ecological data.

We have our next expedition planned for November 2006. We will be traveling south of Hermosillo to Ciudad Obregón where we will continue our search for tortoises in the southern reaches of their geographic range. We look forward to the continuing partnership with Mexican researchers and reaching our long term goal of establishing a plan for conservation of the desert tortoise south of the border!

Mercy Vaughn

As part of continuing coverage on the Bureau of Land Management's changes to livestock grazing regulations, below are announcements from the BLM and from several non-governmental organizations.

* * *

The Final Rule for Grazing Administration– Bureau of Land Management

The Bureau of Land Management published in final form a new set of grazing regulations that will improve the agency's management of public lands grazing. The final regulations, developed with extensive public input and including a detailed environmental analysis, recognize the economic and social benefits of public lands grazing, as well as its role in preserving open space and wildlife habitat in the rapidly growing West.

In announcing the action, BLM Director Kathleen Clarke said: "These new regulations are aimed at promoting more effective and efficient management of public lands grazing, which is a vital part of the history, economy, and social identity of Western rural communities."

The BLM proposed grazing regulation changes in a proposed rule in December 2003. The agency followed up with a draft Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) and received more than 18,000 comments on the proposed rule and draft EIS during a public comment period. The BLM published its final EIS in June 2005, after which the agency announced that it would prepare an additional document (known as an addendum) to respond to comments that came in after the public comment deadline. The addendum was published in March 2006.

The Bureau of Land Management amends its regulations concerning how BLM administers livestock grazing on public lands. The changes ensure:

- ▶ BLM documents its consideration of social, cultural, environmental, and economic consequences of grazing changes;
- ▶ changes in grazing use will be phased in under certain circumstances;
- ▶ allow permittees, lessees, and others to share title to range improvements with BLM in certain circumstances;
- ▶ make clear how BLM will authorize grazing if a BLM decision affecting a grazing permit is stayed pending administrative appeal;
- ▶ remove provisions in the present regulations concerning conservation use grazing permits;
- ▶ Ensure adequate time for developing and successfully implementing an appropriate management action when BLM finds that rangelands do not meet standards and guidelines for rangeland health and that authorized grazing is a significant factor in not achieving one or more land health standards or not conforming with guidelines for grazing administration; and
- ▶ Revise some administrative service charges.

The changes are intended to contribute to improving working relationships with permittee and lessees, protecting the health of the rangelands, and increasing administrative efficiency and effectiveness.

* * *

The first major policy change under the new Secretary of the Department of the Interior does not bode well for the future of America's public lands: Dirk Kempthorne's Bureau of Land Management new rules for livestock grazing limit public participation, make it harder to improve land management, and are aimed at "improving the working relationship with ranchers."

"Secretary Kempthorne is following Gale Norton's lead in allowing private interests to control our public lands," said Greta Anderson, Range Restoration Coordinator for the Center for Biological Diversity. "The new rules are an unabashed hand-out to the grazing industry."

These revisions will no longer require the BLM to inform or consult with the general public on numerous issues, including designating and adjusting allotment boundaries, renewing or issuing grazing permits and leases, modifying permits or leases, or issuing temporary permits or leases. The new regulations also give ranchers title to new structures built at taxpayer expense on their leased allotments, as well as provide opportunities for private interests to gain new water rights on public land. Additionally, the new regulations call for taking up to two years for proposing management changes and up to five years to phase in grazing reductions needed to protect wildlife or water quality, rather than requiring a response the following year. This allows damage to continue for up to seven years.

"Essentially, the new regulations limit the agency's ability to manage pro-actively, and it reflects the prioritization of the industry agenda," said Anderson. "They limit the BLM's ability to implement timely changes, limit public oversight of the process, and thereby impair the quality of wildlife habitat, soils, water and cultural resources on millions of acres of public land."

Agency Staff, Rural Residents, and Conservation Groups Challenge Off-road Vehicles and Desert Management

A broad coalition of public employees, rural property owners, and conservation groups challenged the Bush administration in federal court for failing to protect private property, conservation lands, and endangered wildlife from off-road vehicles across 7.1 million acres of the California Desert Conservation Area.

"There is no question that excessive off-roading causes extensive damage to desert soils, vegetation, and wildlife," said Jeff Aardahl, a respected biologist and manager who recently retired after working for 35 years in the California desert with the Bureau of Land Management and

the National Park Service. “BLM and USFWS are well aware of the harm off-road vehicles are causing to public and private lands and the desert tortoise in the California desert, but they are doing little to nothing to stop it and are even making it worse by expanding excessive off-roading.”

Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility (PEER) and others detail how new management and recreation plans by BLM and the USFWS have turned a blind eye to the damage caused by off-road vehicles in the western Mojave Desert (WEMO) and northern and eastern Colorado (Sonoran) Desert (NECO) regions of Southern California.

“Agency staff and the public are fed up with this administration’s ‘let ‘em eat cake attitude’ as the desert tortoise and other endangered species slide towards extinction,” said Karen Schambach, California Director of PEER. “It’s a disgrace we have to go to court to save species from agencies that are supposed to be protecting and recovering them.”

There have been numerous complaints by private property owners about vandalism, violence, and other damage caused by illegal off-road vehicle use, but poor BLM enforcement has left these problems unchecked. BLM’s new management and route designation plans – which allow increased off-road vehicle use – make matters worse, not only for area property owners but also for endangered wildlife, namely the desert tortoise.

“The science-based, proactive measures outlined in the 1994 Recovery Plan must be implemented on the ground to stabilize and recover desert tortoise populations,” said Dr. Michael Connor, a tortoise biologist. “In contrast to the recovery plan’s recommendations, BLM’s NECO and West Mojave plans authorized more off-roading and other harmful activities that are incompatible with tortoise recovery. The desert tortoise was listed 17 years ago. It is high time that these problems were fixed.”

The Alliance for Responsible Recreation brings a strong challenge to the BLM’s flawed, pro off-road “decision tree,” used to determine if specific off-road routes will be open or closed. The “decision tree,” designed by an off-road advocate, almost always results in routes being designated open to off-road vehicles, even when they harm endangered species or lead to illegal off-road trespass on private property bordering BLM lands.

“The BLM is not being a good neighbor when it invites people to trespass across private property, and it’s not being a good steward of our public lands when it arbitrarily creates a spaghetti bowl of off-road routes without care of its impact on our public lands,” said Jason Fried of the Alliance for Responsible Recreation.

“Desert Survivors has led hundreds of group trips on public lands throughout the California Desert Conservation Area and we keep seeing the same thing: off-road vehicles speeding everywhere, desert washes treated like motocross race tracks, livestock grazing where there is no grass, and new wildlife guzzlers proposed in roadless wilderness,” said Steve Tabor, President of Desert Survivors. “It’s time for a change. In the age of Bush irresponsibility, this lawsuit is absolutely necessary.”

The legal challenge – which also addresses harm from commercial livestock grazing and artificial water tanks – seeks an invalidation of BLM’s NECO plan, WEMO plan, and its WEMO route designation as well as USFWS’s biological opinions for them. The lawsuit also seeks a court order that will truly protect and recover the tortoise and other endangered species by requiring that the Department of Interior draft new plans.

“We have no choice but to go to court to challenge the unsupportable decisions of the BLM and Fish and Wildlife Service in the California desert,” said Daniel R. Patterson, desert ecologist with the Center for Biological Diversity who formerly worked with BLM in the California Desert

Conservation Area. "The Endangered Species Act works, and swift, corrective action to follow the law must be taken by the Interior Department so the desert tortoise and other endangered species can stabilize and recover."

FEASIBILITY ASSESSMENT REPORT for Collaborative Desert Tortoise Recovery Planning Process

The U.S. Institute for Environmental Conflict Resolution has released the [FEASIBILITY ASSESSMENT REPORT for Collaborative Desert Tortoise Recovery Planning Process Proposed by U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service](#), prepared by a team from the U.S. Institute and the Center for Collaborative Policy.

The report represents the assessment team's best professional judgment regarding the feasibility of a collaborative recovery planning process, as proposed by USFWS, along with thoughts on an appropriate design and sequence of steps to take in embarking on a collaborative effort. While many elements appear to be converging that would support development of the Revised Recovery Plan for the desert tortoise through a collaborative process, the assessment team identified two key conditions that must be adequately addressed before proceeding. If these feasibility issues can be resolved and USFWS decides to pursue a collaborative recovery planning process, the assessment team recommended a stepwise approach with specific key milestones to gauge progress and an appropriate deadline for completing the recovery planning process.

The U.S. Institute will now step back while USFWS and others interested in desert tortoise recovery consider the feasibility assessment and the recommendations for how to move forward.

Desert Managers Group - Managers Meeting Nov 1-2, 2006 Death Valley National Park, CA

The next Desert Managers Group meeting will be held November 1 to 2, 2006, at Death Valley National Park. The meeting will begin at 8:30 a.m. on November 1st and adjourn at 3:00 p.m. on November 2nd. J. T. Reynolds, Superintendent, Death Valley National Park will host the meeting. Please follow the below link for more meeting information and a draft agenda. Any reading material will be posted about one week before the meeting.

<http://www.dmg.gov/>

New Amphibiaweb Accounts Announced

AmphibiaWeb (<http://amphibiaweb.org>) is pleased to announce an agreement with the University of California Press to post all of the species accounts from "Amphibian Declines," edited by Michael Lannoo. Authors are encouraged to update the accounts. Another new feature of AmphibiaWeb is a monthly update of literature on amphibian declines, prepared by Tim Halliday of the Declining Amphibian Population Task Force. To access the list, go to the home page, click on "Amphibian Declines," then "VII. Recent Scientific Publications." The list is searchable on a month-by-month basis.

The Behler Award for Freshwater Turtle Conservation

Dr. Edward O. Moll, a lifelong turtle researcher and conservationist, is the first recipient of the Behler Award, a new and major annual award jointly presented by the IUCN Turtle Survival Alliance and IUCN Tortoise and Freshwater Turtle Specialist Group, to honor leadership and excellence in the field of turtle and tortoise conservation. Dr. Moll is an active member of the Tucson Herpetological Society.

The first honoree to receive the Behler Award, Edward Moll has a lifetime of achievements in turtle conservation, and was the first Chair of the IUCN Tortoise and Freshwater Turtle Specialist Group from 1981 to 1985. His work and leadership in the field have been inspirational and ground-breaking. The biology and conservation of tropical river turtles have been an important part of his research interests, and fieldwork over a 30 year period has taken him to Mexico, Central and South America, as well as India. His work on critically endangered river terrapins in Malaysia has been of particular importance. He is also the author of 75 scientific and popular publications.

Named in honor of the late John Behler, a leading herpetologist and previous Chair of the IUCN Tortoise and Freshwater Turtle Specialist Group, the first annual Behler Award was presented at the 4th Annual Symposium on Conservation and Biology of Freshwater Turtles and Tortoises held in St. Louis, Missouri 10 to 13 August 2006.

The Award was presented jointly by the IUCN Turtle Survival Alliance and IUCN Tortoise and Freshwater Turtle Specialist Group and includes an honorarium of \$3000. Co-sponsoring organizations for the first annual award were Chelonian Research Foundation, Conservation International, Chelonian Research Institute, John L. Behler Chelonian Conservation Center, World Chelonian Trust, and Durrell Wildlife Conservation Trust.

In addition to recognizing the life-time achievements of leading turtle and tortoise conservationists, the Behler Award also plans to honor the current conservation efforts of mid-career individuals whose often tireless and dedicated efforts are making major contributions in the field.

Read more about [IUCN SSC Tortoise and Freshwater Specialist Group and the IUCN SSC Turtle Survival Alliance](#).

Turtle Survival Alliance 2006 Newsletter Now Available

The Turtle Survival Alliance (TSA) 2006 newsletter is now available on the TSA web page. This Issue (#6) contains 29 full color pages. Please take the time to read about the current Turtle Survival Alliance happenings.

<http://www.turtlesurvival.org/TSANewsletter2006.pdf>

Release of Issue 1 of Herpetological Conservation and Biology

The editorial staff of Herpetological Conservation and Biology (HCB) announces the release of the inaugural issue on September 27, 2006. The first issue is 70 pages long and contains 12 articles. Everyone is invited to peruse the articles posted on the journal website (<http://www.herpconbio.org>) and welcome feedback that might help improve the journal. Herpetological Conservation and Biology is an international open-use electronic journal published in partnership with Partners in Amphibian and Reptile Conservation (PARC) and the World Congress of Herpetology. All material except Editorials and Announcements receive anonymous peer review. The current acceptance rate for submitted articles is about 50%. There are no page charges or download fees for HCB users. Print versions of HCB are planned for release at the end of each year. The journal is indexed by BioAbstracts and Zoological Record. The current editorial staff is around 60 members and there are plans to expand the International presence this fall.

DARWIN'S WRITINGS AVAILABLE ON THE WORLD WIDE WEB

The largest collection of Darwin's writings ever published will appear on the website The Complete Work of Charles Darwin Online (<http://darwin-online.org.uk/>) on 19 October, 2006. Never before has so much Darwin material, and so

many rare and widely dispersed items, been brought together in one place and made available free of charge. This site currently offers more than 50,000 pages of searchable text and 40,000 images of both publications and transcribed manuscripts. Most of the materials are available both as fully formatted electronic text and color images of the originals. Darwin's works are also available as free machine-read audio mp3 files. The project, designed and directed by Dr. John van Wyhe of Christ's College, Cambridge, is hosted by the Center for Research in the Arts, Social Sciences, and Humanities at the University of Cambridge.

The web page also includes the largest Darwin bibliography ever produced, based on the work of R. B. Freeman, and the largest catalogue of manuscripts (with over 30,000 entries) ever published. More than 150 supplementary documents are also provided, from secondary reference works to contemporary reviews, obituaries, published descriptions of Darwin's Beagle specimens and important related works for studying and understanding Darwin and his work. Each work containing illustrations or maps are provided with an overview page of thumbnail images allowing readers to see in seconds all the illustrations which are scattered throughout hundreds of pages. The thumbnails take readers directly to the larger version of the image in its context within the original work.

Most of the materials provided are appearing online for the first time such as the first edition of the Journal of Researches (1839)(or Voyage of the Beagle), The Descent of Man (1871), The Zoology of the Voyage of H.M.S. Beagle (1838-43) and the 2nd, 3rd, 4th and 5th editions of the Origin of Species. There are also many newly transcribed and never before published manuscripts such as Darwin's Beagle field notebooks. One of these, the notebook in which

Darwin recorded his immediate thoughts on the Galapagos, was stolen in the early 1980s and is still missing, but the text has been transcribed from microfilm. The many contributors and benefactors who have kindly helped to create this milestone in Darwin studies can be found on the website's acknowledgments.

As vast as the collection now is, there is much still to come. The site currently contains about 50 percent of the materials that will be provided by 2009, the bicentenary of Darwin's birth and the 150th anniversary of the publication of the Origin of species. Forthcoming materials include further editions and translations, images of the majority of the Darwin Archive at Cambridge University Library, more editorial introductions, notes, transcriptions, and technical facilities for printing and larger images. New content is continually being added.

RENO TUR-TOISE CLUB HONORED

The Reno Tur-toise Club received a plaque from the Nevada Wildlife Federation as affiliate club of the year along with a commendation from Senator Harry Reid honoring them as affiliate club of the year.

The Reno Tur-toise Club has been in business nearly 15 years and has adopted out over 1750 tortoises to folks in Northern Nevada. Their fall meeting on October 21 will be their 15-year anniversary. They are having a party to celebrate.

<http://www.sierrawave.com/rttc/index.htm>

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

Check one: _____ MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION/RENEWAL _____ CHANGE OF ADDRESS
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_____ Regular (**\$15.00** per year) _____ Organization (\$55.00 per year)
_____ Contributing (\$50.00 per year) _____ Lifetime (\$300 or more)
_____ Student (**\$10.00** per year- Requires endorsement of student's advisor or Major Professor)

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 3273**
Beaumont, CA 92223

The Desert Tortoise Council does not release its membership list

www.deserttortoise.org