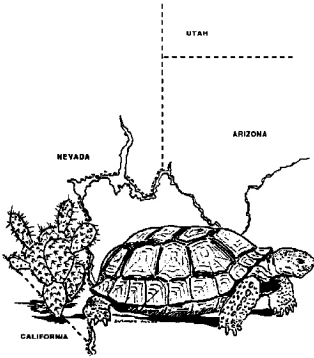


THE DESERT TORTOISE COUNCIL NEWSLETTER



WINTER 2006-2007
OUR 31ST YEAR

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

2007 ANNUAL SYMPOSIUM LAS VEGAS

The 32nd Annual Symposium promises more diversity than in previous years: we have several featured speakers and special sessions spanning the entire geographic range of the desert tortoise, as well as two other species of *Gopherus*, other chelonians, and the Gila monster, an occupant of much of the geographic range of the desert tortoise. The broad coverage of the science and conservation problems facing these reptiles will provide attendees with regional and global contexts for current issues.

Two featured speakers, Professors Michael Manfredo and Tara Teel from Colorado State University, will present the results of a recent 19-state study about changing societal views of wildlife. Their joint presentation, titled A Foundation for Conflict: Wildlife Values in the West, was a collaborative regional effort and has implications for future wildlife management in the West. Dr. James Juvik returns this year from the University of Hawaii to give a Saturday evening presentation on The Diverse Tortoise Fauna of Hyper-arid Southern Namibia: Emerging Conservation Opportunities at the Meta-landscape Scale. His presentation is an

outgrowth of a recent trip to the region and a focus on multi-species conservation efforts. Kitty Jensen, Universiti Malaysia Sarawak and formerly with the National Park Service at the Mojave National Preserve, will give an overview of land turtles on Borneo, with an emphasis on the first ecological study of the Asian soft-shell turtle.

Roy Averill-Murray, Desert Tortoise Recovery Coordinator for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, is chairing a large session on behalf of the Desert Tortoise Recovery Office. Speakers include Mike Eng (U. S. Institute for Environmental Conflict Resolution), Roy Averill-Murray, Dr. Robert Steidl (University of Arizona), Dr. Todd Esque (USGS), Dr. Jill Heaton (University of Nevada, Reno), Dr. Michael Reed (Tufts University), Linda Allison (USFWS), and Clarence Everly and Jordan Henk (Desert Managers Group). The talks are focused on data being used to revise the 1994 Desert Tortoise (Mojave Population) Recovery Plan and include recovery criteria, habitat modeling, distance sampling and threat indicators, vital rate sensitivity, and range-wide monitoring.

Dr. Dan Beck from Central Washington University and author of a new book on Gila

monsters will offer a special session on Saturday morning about Gila monsters. Dr. Beck and several speakers will provide the latest information about Gila monsters in seven presentations including physiological similarities with the tortoise and using the tortoise as an umbrella species for Gila monsters. Many of you will remember his entertaining presentation a few years ago. He will be signing copies of his new book on both Friday and Saturday nights.

Several sessions on desert tortoises will include such topics as head-starting at Edwards Air Force Base and Twenty-nine Palms; research on new survey techniques, including use of dogs; variation in home range sizes by desert region, time period, and analytic technique; the Ft. Irwin Translocation Project; an analysis of the 2005 fire season and its effects on habitat; studies of microhabitat use; social behavior; female preferences for mates; and health and diseases of tortoises involved in various projects.

Joe Truett and Myles Traphagen of the Turner Endangered Species Fund will discuss translocation of the bolson tortoise (*Gopherus flavomarginatus*) to the Armendaris Ranch in south central New Mexico, part of the prehistoric range.

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.

Because of the positive feedback we received regarding the Saturday evening event, we will again be having a mixer only, with no banquet. We will also do our best to have the Saturday evening program finish as early as possible. There will be the traditional Friday evening social, breakfast on Saturday and Sunday.

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. A registration form is below. Please note that the "Spouse Registration" is for spouses to attend the social events ONLY. It is not intended for spouses that attend most of the symposium. Persons attending the presentations and most of the scheduled events need to register.

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.

REGISTRATIONS INSIDE THIS ISSUE

You must register to attend. Preregistration as a member is the best value. The deadline for receipt of early registration is January 14, 2007.

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.

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 | \$40 (inc. breakfasts/socials) | _____ |
| Regular Membership Dues | \$15.00 (see dues schedule in a newsletter) | _____ |
| NEWSLETTER FORMAT: | | |
| _____ Mailed paper copy | _____ Pdf file via e-mail | _____ E-mail notice for web page viewing |
| | 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: _____

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PHOTO CONTEST

The Council sponsors the annual Photo Contest to honor and encourage our members to participate in educating the public through photography. Cari Ronning is managing the 2007 Photo Contest.

FORMAT. For 2007, the format is mounted print and digital photographs either in black and white or color (no slides). All prints must be matted, **NO GLASS FRAMES** please. All prints must be labeled with the following information placed on the back of the **PRINT**: common and scientific names of subject; location; date **PRINT** was taken; contestant's name, address, and phone number; and entry category. No names on the front, please, but titles and date are acceptable. This year, the Council encourages contest entrants to also submit electronic copies (in jpg format) of their entries so that they can be posted on the website before the Symposium.

AWARDS. Qualified winners will be awarded first, second, and third place ribbons in each of the eight categories. First Place awards will be \$50; second and third place winners will receive ribbons. The Best of Show will receive \$100.

CATEGORIES.

1. WILD DESERT TORTOISES
2. CAPTIVE (PET) DESERT TORTOISES
3. OTHER DESERT REPTILES
4. DESERT MAMMALS
5. OTHER DESERT WILDLIFE
6. WILD DESERT PLANTS
7. DESERT SCENICS
8. TORTOISE CONSERVATION. This category covers a range of subjects, but must depict activities or subject matter important to the perpetuation of the species. Examples are research, impacts (i.e., raven predation), improvements (i.e., fencing), and environmental education.

OTHER RULES. **The contestant must be a registered attendee of the 2007 Symposium.** With the exception of Captive (Pet) Tortoises, all **PRINTS** must be taken of **WILD** (i.e., unrestrained and photographed in its natural habitat) subjects occurring **WITHIN THE GEOGRAPHIC RANGE OF THE DESERT TORTOISE**. Each contestant may submit a maximum of two **PRINTS** per category. Photos must have been taken by the contestant.

SUBMISSION OF PRINTS. **PRINTS** must be available for viewing no later than 1:30 p.m. on Friday afternoon, February 23. You may either bring your prints and provide them to Cari Ronning at the Symposium early on Friday or mail them to her at: 2214 Little River Court, Las Vegas, NV 89156. **PRINTS** must arrive at this address by Friday, February 16, 2007. Photographers do not need to be present to win. To ensure that your entries are posted on the website before the Symposium, submit electronic copies (in jpg format) to the [DTC webmaster](#).

JUDGING. Prints will be judged at the Symposium by the attendees. Attendees will pick up ballots at the registration table and voting will be from 3:00 p.m. Friday to Saturday until 3:00 p.m. Winners will be announced at the Awards on Saturday night.

PRINTS will not be returned, except upon advance request, and will become the property of the Desert Tortoise Council. The Council will have the right to use these photographs in its publications and educational programs, as well as to assign such permission to others, with full credit given to the photographer.

15th ANNUAL SURVEYING, MONITORING, & HANDLING TECHNIQUES WORKSHOP

One hundred and twenty-three students recently attended the DTC's workshop in Ridgecrest, California, bringing the total 15-year enrollment to over 1,200 participants. Participating in the workshop were 93 consultants from 27 different firms. The consulting firm TRC Solutions enrolled eight, and there were six each from Teracor Resource Management and Michael Brandman Associates. LSA, Joshua Tree National Park Service, and Cal Trans each had five people enrolled. Seven employees from the BLM, two from the USFWS, and two from CDFG also took part in the workshop.

The DTC would like to extend its sincere thanks to the donors who supported the workshop. Four companies contributed money toward this highly acclaimed event. The donors listed alphabetically include:

Garcia and Associates (GANDA)
**Karen Kirtland of Natural Resources
Assessment, Inc.**
Natural Resource Consultants (NRC)
**Ray and Sharon Romero of Romero
Enterprises, Inc.**

The Council would like to thank the following speakers and instructors who donated their time and effort: Dr. Kristin Berry (UGSG-BRD), Ray Bransfield (USFWS), Lisa Bucci (Nongame Branch AZ Game & Fish), Paul Frank, Gilbert Goodlett (EnviroPlus Consulting), Erich Green, Dr. Brian Henen, Becky Jones (CA Dept. Fish & Game), Dr. Alice Karl (Alice Karl & Associates), Bob Parker (BLM), Ray Romero (CH2M Hill), Liz Smith, Rachel Woodard, and Peter Woodman (Kiva Biological Consulting).

The Council would also like to thank the following volunteers who helped with the

registration and set-up of the outdoor plots. They include: Mike Bailey, Tracy Bailey, Wayne Ball, Mark Bratton, Travis Cooper, Lacey Greene, Russell Kokx, Bob Parker, Liz Smith, Rachel Woodard, and Peter Woodman.

Finally, we would like to extend special thanks to Gilbert Goodlett and Ellen Schafhauser for again allowing us to use their audio/visual equipment and for setting up the equipment; to David Carr for running the audio/visual equipment; to Ally Sheehy for assisting with the audio equipment; to Patty Glasco for providing her pet tortoises for the handling demonstration; and to Ed LaRue for his fantastic job emceeding the workshop and keeping it on schedule!

The DTC coordinates these workshops because we believe that well-trained, knowledgeable biologists and monitors for projects play essential roles in the conservation of tortoises and their habitats.

INTERESTED IN ATTENDING THE 2007 WORKSHOP? Space is limited to 120 people! The next workshop is scheduled for November 3 and 4, 2007 in Ridgecrest. If you'd like to be placed on the list to attend or if you'd like to make a donation toward the workshop, please e-mail: tracy.bailey@mchsi.com.

JOURNAL OF HERPETOLOGICAL CONSERVATION AND BIOLOGY

The next issue of Herpetological Conservation and Biology will be released in early January. A New Journal Published in Partnership with Partners in Amphibian and Reptile Conservation and the World Congress of Herpetology.

<http://www.herpconbio.org>

DESERT TORTOISE COUNCIL BOARD OF DIRECTORS

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|------------------------------|--------------------------------|
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GIS WORKSHOPS

The company, New Urban Research, teaches two workshops that might be of interest to our membership. California Geographic Information Systems (GIS) workshops are scheduled for January and July of 2007. This workshop is titled: Mapping California Communities: An Introduction to GIS and Community Analysis. Using GIS for grant writing, program evaluation, general community analysis, and program planning is a skill many organizations are trying to develop. The course offers a quick, practical introduction to GIS and California community analysis.

The mapping workshop is a unique, hands-on workshop which teaches the fundamentals of how to use a GIS in a way that is relevant to social service providers, planners, and researchers. Participants learn to make thematic maps of their community, geocode addresses, and perform spatial queries and analysis. Also

included is access to the web workshop Analyzing Your Community: Using the Census to Better Analyze Changing Places and People.

<https://www.urban-research.info/ur/workshops/workshops-gis-CA.shtml>

NEWSLETTER

One of the costs the Desert Tortoise Council has is the mailing of the newsletter. On average, it costs about \$175 per issue to mail newsletters. That works out to about \$700 annually. You can help reduce our costs by electing to receive the newsletter via electronic mail as an Adobe pdf file, or you can receive an e-mail notice that the newsletter is available on our web page for viewing or download.

In addition to reducing the amount of paper needed to produce a newsletter and reducing our workload, members receiving the newsletter electronically get it quicker. When newsletters are finished, they are usually e-mailed the same day, while printing and mailing can take several days. Often, the hard copy version may arrive a week or more later than the electronic files. This can make a difference in the timely dissemination of information. For example, mailed copies of this newsletter may arrive after the deadline for symposium registration, while the electronic version will arrive a week before the deadline.

So, to save time, paper, money, and get the newsletter quicker, elect to receive the newsletter in an electronic format when you renew your membership, or notify the DTC Membership Chair of your wishes. Thank you for your continued membership!

**GERALD R. FORD:
PARK RANGER AND 38TH
PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED
STATES**

Gerald R. Ford holds a special place in the heart of the National Park Service family. He will be remembered by the world for his accomplishments as President of the United States and his compassion in healing the nation's wounds following the war in Vietnam and Watergate. For the National Park Service, he is considered one of our own; he is the only American President to have served as a park ranger in the National Park Service.

In the summer of 1936, Gerald Ford worked as a seasonal park ranger at Yellowstone National Park. Ford later recalled that time as, "One of the greatest summers of my life." According to his supervisor at Yellowstone, District Ranger Frank Anderson, Ford was "a darned good ranger." While serving in Yellowstone, one of Ford's assignments was as an armed guard on the bear-feeding truck. The National Park Service no longer feeds the bears, but Ford always remembered that duty and often regaled his family with stories about the bear-feeding truck. During his summer at Yellowstone, Ford also worked in the Canyon Hotel and Lodge meeting and greeting VIPS, a job Ford told his supervisor was "undemocratic and un-American to give special attention to VIPs." According to Wayne Repogle, Ford's roommate that summer, one of the duties that Ford particularly enjoyed was the early morning check. Early every morning, each automobile in camp had to be checked for make, model, state and license number. Repogle indicated that the rangers had to run most of the time to get 150 to 200 licenses listed in two hours. As a football player, Ford was very fit and saw this duty as an opportunity to stay in shape. Repogle stated that Ford genuinely enjoyed, "everything we rangers had to do."

**CATALOG OF FEDERAL
FUNDING SOURCES FOR
WATERSHED PROTECTION**

The Catalog of Federal Funding Sources for Watershed Protection Web site is a searchable database of financial assistance sources (grants, loans, cost-sharing) available to fund a variety of watershed protection projects. To select funding programs for particular requirements, use either of two searches below. One is based on subject matter criteria, and the other is based on words in the title of the funding program. Criteria searches include the type of organization (e.g., non-profit groups, private landowner, state, business), type of assistance sought (grants or loans), and keywords (e.g., agriculture, wildlife habitat). Searches result in a listing of programs by name. Click on each program name to review detailed information on the funding source.

<http://cfpub.epa.gov/fedfund/>

**TOURNAMENT OF ROSES
PARADE TORTOISE FLOAT**

On January 1, 2007, the 118th Tournament of Roses Parade in Pasadena featured a float by the City of Palmdale with tortoises. Titled Good Nature Begins At Home, the theme conveys the importance of Palmdale as home to both families and nature. The following is from the Tournament of Roses magazine: "On the float, springtime arrives in the California high desert with the celebration of new life as two recently hatched desert tortoises explore their tranquil surroundings along side their mother. The vivid natural landscape comes magnificently alive in color and texture with barrel and cholla cacti in full bloom and sandy canyon walls that were created using over 20,000 roses in sunrise hues of golden rust, light and deep coral and glowing orange. The City of Palmdale's float honors strong and supportive families and depicts

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respect for the environment by truly showing that Good Nature Begins at Home." The Palmdale float won the Past Presidents Most Creative Use of Floral and Non-Floral.



Also, Rain Bird International had a float with lots of lizards! Titled "Natural Beauties," Rainbird describes the float in the following way: "Throughout the ages mankind has been captivated by the grandeur, beauty and harmony of the natural world and its vivid array of flora and fauna. With its 11th Rose Parade float, Rain Bird pays tribute to the role water plays in sustaining all plants and animals in ecosystems around the world with their float, "Natural Beauties." Through the float's depiction of reptiles from a variety of regions, Rain Bird encourages the intelligent use of water and conservation of Earth's most precious resource. The Rain Bird float won the Judges' Special Award for Most Spectacular in Showmanship and Dramatic Impact.



NAIL TRIMMING FOR BLOOD COLLECTION FROM DESERT TORTOISES, *GOPHERUS AGASSIZI*: PANEL SUMMARY

Jay D Johnson, DVM

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Tempe, AZ 85282, USA

BACKGROUND

Recent authorization by the USFWS of blood collection from desert tortoises by means of cutting a nail has created controversy amongst biologists, veterinarians, and researchers working with these animals. A panel discussion on this topic was held at the Association of Reptilian and Amphibian Veterinarians annual conference on April 14, 2005. Participants included Roy Averill-Murray, Dr. Elliott Jacobson, Dr. Jim Jarchow, Dr. Jay D. Johnson (moderator), Dr. Ron Marlow, Dr. Mark Mitchell, Dr. Richard Simmonds, Dr. C. Richard Tracy, Dr. Jim Wellehan, Dr. Susan Wilson-Sanders. The protocol called for incremental cutting of a single hind leg toenail (from adult tortoises) until the distal end of the toenail vascular bed (TNVB) is reached, blood appears on the surface, and up to 400 microliters collected on filter paper discs and in capillary tubes. The TNVB is not to be cut more than 2-3 mm from its distal margins. The protocol was designed and intended for adult tortoises. This protocol is not acceptable for smaller tortoises and better guidelines are needed for different size ranges. Silver nitrate is used to cauterize the blood vessels of the quick, and the tortoise is observed to ensure bleeding has stopped prior to release. The procedure is performed on wild tortoises in the field using aseptic techniques. Significantly differing opinions were expressed through email and telephone calls amongst desert tortoise researchers regarding the procedure.

Toenail trimming is used to collect blood of numerous other species, including the southwest willow flycatcher (endangered, Busch *et al.*, 2000); other passerines (Rodriguez and Matta, 2001) and hummingbirds (Gaunt and Oring, 1999); Utah prairie dogs (endangered), black-tailed prairie dogs, Gunnison's prairie dogs (e.g., Hoogland, 1995); as well as other turtles and birds if other techniques are unsuccessful (e.g., Jenkins, 1996; Phillips, 1999). Nail trimming is also mentioned in several veterinary textbooks as a site for obtaining blood samples. The impact of such sampling on these species is unknown and needs further investigation.

There are two conflicting opinions concerning toenail trimming as a blood sampling method. One view is that the procedure does not cause perceivable pain (as evidenced by the lack of a withdrawal reflex in most tortoises), it minimizes stress in comparison to restraint for venipuncture, and it requires minimal technical training. The opposing view is that there is potentially more pain induced by trimming a toe-nail than venipuncture, that risk of infection is greater than with venipuncture, and that samples may not be of good value for serologic testing. Both biologists and veterinarians have taken positions on both sides of this debate.

PANEL DISCUSSION

Dr. Elliott Jacobson reviewed different methods of blood collection from chelonians and other reptiles. Different investigators have used a variety of sites to obtain blood from chelonians. From the literature these include the heart, jugular vein, subcarapacial vein, brachial vein, ventral and dorsal coccygeal veins, and trimmed toenails (reviewed by Barrows *et al.*, 2004, and Jenkins, 1996). Each sampling method has certain advantages and disadvantages.

Following his presentation, the group agreed that it is important that wildlife handling and

tissue-sampling techniques, including blood sampling, should be evaluated relative to the research questions being asked, risks of pain and injury to individual study animals and populations, and skill and training required. Handling time should be minimized as much as possible. Risks should be quantified as much as possible through well-designed scientific study.

The attendees agreed that investigators should attempt to minimize stress and handling when obtaining samples from desert tortoises. While jugular venipuncture is likely to provide the best sample for serologic testing and for blood profiles (due to low risk of hemodilution; Gottdenker and Jacobson, 1995), restraint for jugular venipuncture is likely to be one of the more stressful methods of blood collection in tortoises, and the method requires the most skill and training, making it impractical for general use by most field biologists. Sampling from the brachial vein also was discussed and considered to have certain disadvantages, such as stress and difficulty in obtaining a sample, especially from sick or dehydrated tortoises. Of 18 experienced field biologists conducting desert tortoise surveys in California in 2005, only 4 were deemed skilled enough by the instructor to receive training to learn the procedure.

The pros and cons of toenail trimming were discussed. The simplicity of this method was a major consideration in its selection. While short-term unpublished studies assessing toe-nail trimming in desert tortoises at the University of Nevada, Reno, do not show visible problems, the tortoises need additional evaluation to determine the absence or presence of low-grade infection of the toes whose nails were trimmed. Local infections, which may initially be facilitated by microbes accessing the opening left in the nail prior to it healing, may not be apparent for years. Autoclaving nail trimmers, cleaning the toe thoroughly with antiseptic, and sealing the open end with surgical glue such as Nexaban are likely to lessen the risk for infection. Further studies

evaluating x-rays of bones of the foot and long-term healing should be evaluated.

Toenail trimming was also considered less stressful and painful than venipuncture. However no scientific data were presented to support this view. It was agreed that pain sensation and perception is not well understood in reptiles, but does exist. It was pointed out that just because the tortoise does not exhibit signs of pain at the time a sample is obtained, it does not mean that it is experiencing less pain.

Long-term effects, such as decreased activity with more time spent in its burrow, decreased foraging, and decreased time for mating, may be consequences of many procedures that may appear to be benign at the time they are used. The amount and duration of pain stimulus, or other forms of stress (e.g., resulting from water lost through voiding the bladder), from any blood-collection method used in the field (especially by non-medical professionals) are unknown but cannot be and ignored. Further long-term studies should be performed to assess any changes in behavioral or reproductive patterns that might occur after obtaining blood by any procedure.

Several attending veterinarians recommended sampling from the subcarapacial vein as an excellent alternative to toe-nail trimming, especially for assays that are not compromised by lymph dilution. Many of the veterinarians considered this a safe and easy method of obtaining blood. Case studies described by Hernandez-Divers *et al.* (2002) suggest that with little practice this technique can be a safe alternative to venipuncture or toenail trimming. Several veterinarians from Nevada and California said they would help in training field personnel in collecting blood from this site. A consensus of the veterinarians present was that the subcarapacial vein is the recommended site for the University of Nevada, Reno, desert tortoise research group to obtain blood for their studies.

Regardless of the methods used, one negative outcome of stressing tortoises is voiding urine from their bladder. This has the potential to lead to dehydration and illness if the tortoise is unable to replace these fluids for long periods, especially during periods of drought. Allowing tortoises to drink in clean containers or administering epicoelomic fluids should be considered for tortoises that void their bladders during handling.

The veterinary standpoint is that pain should be assumed and minimized whenever possible. If another option for blood collection is available that lessens pain, it should be used regardless of the increased work or technical training involved. By itself, simplicity should not be the driving force that ultimately determines the method employed. The assays being performed need to be considered when selecting a method to obtain blood. If the thrust of the project being undertaken by the University of Nevada desert tortoise research group is a genetics study of desert tortoise populations, then samples such as conjunctival or oral swab should be sufficient. If serology is an equally important aspect in their project, then samples from a trimmed toenail need to be validated against samples from venipuncture sites. One should not assume that they are equivalent.

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The ARAV hopes to work with FWS in developing protocols for collecting blood and other samples from desert tortoises and other reptiles. The expertise of this group can be called upon at anytime. Thank you to all who participated in th discussion and preparation of this document.

Journal of Herpetological Medicine and Surgery
Volume 16, No. 2,20

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CONSERVATION NEWS

* * * * *

Environmental Assessment to Renew Grazing Permits Out for Public Review

The BLM Ridgecrest Field Office, is seeking public comment on an Environmental Assessment for Ephemeral Sheep Grazing Permit Renewal. A 30-day comment period began on January 1 and runs through January 30, 2007.

The BLM is proposing to renew 20 ephemeral sheep grazing permits and leases for 10 years under the grazing prescriptions contained in the West Mojave Plan Amendment to the California Desert Conservation Area Plan and the associated biological opinion. This action affects livestock grazing on eleven allotments within the Ridgecrest Field Office. These allotments contain occupied desert tortoise habitat.

The complete environmental assessment for the permit/lease renewal authorization appears online at <http://www.blm.gov/ca/ridgecrest/>. Public comments may be submitted by mail to: Ridgecrest Field Office, 300 S. Richmond Road, Ridgecrest, CA or by email to ca650@ca.blm.gov. All comments must be received or postmarked by January 30, 2007.

Reading copies are available at the Ridgecrest Field Office, (760) 384-5400; and at the California Desert District Office, 22835 Calle San Juan De Los Lagos, Moreno Valley (951) 697-5200. To request a printed copy of the EA, contact the Ridgecrest Field Office.

Bolson Tortoise

On September 15, 2006, a ceremony to celebrate the historic release of the Bolson Tortoise on the Armendariz Ranch, in southern New Mexico, was held. This project is sponsored by the

Turner Endangered Species Fund and the ranch is owned by Ted Turner. We will hear more about Bolson tortoise conservation at the symposium in February. For further news on this event, please visit:

<http://www.torctimes.com/bolson.html>

**Desert Tortoise Preserve Committee
32nd Annual Banquet and General Meeting
January 27, 2007**

The DTPC's Annual Meeting and Banquet will be held Saturday, January 27, 2007 at the Essex House Hotel and Convention Center, in Lancaster, California. The afternoon Annual Meeting will feature review of the Committee's ongoing programs and activities, plans for 2007, and guest speakers from the Bureau of Land Management and the California Department of Fish and Game will give updates on important activities. The Banquet speaker will be Mark Massar, DTPC Board Member and BLM Wildlife Biologist. To RSVP and for additional information contact: Stephanie Pappas (805-901-8746) or Mark Bratton (661-943-3118).

Mark will be discussing female choice in the mating system of the desert tortoise. Female choice is the preference females have to mate with particular males and not with others, and is a phenomenon seen throughout the Animal Kingdom. As Darwin put it, the males of many species attempt to "excite or charm" the females with "their gaudy coloring and various ornaments, their power of song, and their glands for emitting odors... the females exert some choice and accept one male in preference to others." But what evidence is there that female desert tortoises are likewise as discriminatory in their mating decisions? Mark will present evidence from the literature and from observations at a study site in the eastern Mojave Desert in an attempt to answer this question.

**New Congress Brings New Approaches to
Endangered Species Conservation**

With the defeat of the Endangered Species Act's number one nemesis, Richard Pombo, lawmakers are moving quickly to improve the conservation of endangered plants and animals by enlisting the aid of private landowners.

Already Senators Mike Crapo (R-ID), Blanche Lincoln (D-AR), Charles Grassley (R-IA), and Max Baucus (D-MT) have introduced the bipartisan Endangered Species Recovery Act which provides financial incentives for private landowners to help save endangered plants and animals. The legislation would provide \$400 million annually in new tax credits, plus additional deductions and exclusions, for private landowners who take steps to help endangered or threatened species on the properties they own.

"Partnering with private landowners on wildlife conservation is absolutely critical," said Defenders of Wildlife President Rodger Schlickeisen in praising the bill. "This legislation provides key incentives to enlist more landowners in this effort, which benefits people and endangered species alike."

This renewed focus on species conservation and recovery is a welcome change from the last six years where the Endangered Species Act faced numerous attempts to weaken its protections. All who care about imperiled plants and animals can only hope this is a sign of things to come.

Rep. Nick Rahall, a longtime wildlife champion, has taken over as Chairman of the important House Resources Committee, replacing Rep. Richard Pombo. Take a moment to read Rep. Rahall's statement on what we can expect from his chairmanship:

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