

Detailed Guidelines on the Desert Tortoise Council's Gila Monster Field Trip

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Please do not check the "I read this" box on the form without reading this letter first. There are many important tidbits within this letter that will help assure a great day for all. (Including the organizers!)

When: February 20, 2019, 8:00 AM to 5:00 PM (Door to door at Westward Look)

Where: The majority of participants will leave the Westward Look after we go over all the information on this letter. Please read and understand this "Guideline letter" ahead of time, and we will all get out the door quicker.

Purpose: To have fun, see a wild Gila Monster (*Heloderma suspectum*—hereafter referred to as HESU), and assist future efforts in monitoring the herpetofauna in the places that we visit. There is a strong chance that the participants of this field trip will find some new study animals.

History of the study: A small group of herpetologists have been studying the overwintering phenomena of site fidelity with HESU, three species of rattlesnakes (*Crotalus atrox*, *C. tigris*, and *C. molossus*), Western Lyresnakes (*Trimorphodon lambda*), and Sonoran Desert Tortoises (*Gopherus morafkai*). The studies have covered a wide range of methodology from using photography to identify individuals at their shelters (which will be our method), as well as mark and recapture, and radio-telemetry. One of the places that we will visit today has been under watch since 1992. Another place we will stop has been watched since 1998. What has been learned through the years is that to pull any species of reptile from their overwintering sites for any reason is to risk driving them away permanently. (Repp, data published in too many places to enumerate here). That is the reason we will not be touching anything that is in a shelter today.

The ultimate edict of this field trip is: Please enjoy your day here, and then forget about the exact locations revealed. Further visits on your part can and will disrupt what we are trying to accomplish. Please help us keep the places and animals viewed today as pristine as possible by staying away from them in the future. Thanks!

Edict number 2: Everybody arrives on the Vigas Patio at 0800 SHARP, with food in their stomachs, ready to walk out the door and go! Have everything you need for the day with you.

Edict number 3: There will be no habitat disturbance, and no collecting of reptiles allowed on this field trip.

Drivers and passengers: Repp will ask all drivers to step forward at this point. Any drivers who have designated passengers (spouse, best friends, etc)—please gather them with you now. While this is happening, the rest of you, please start to buddy up. We will see who is left without a ride, and do our best to get you one. Chop chop!

Sign up! Once edict 3 is read, Repp will distribute a sign up sheet. Please legibly print your name. There is a crowd coming, and we don't want to lose anybody! Thanks. (You will also be asked to sign out at the end of the day).

Note: Dark sunglasses greatly hampers your ability to see creatures that are all in the shade while bright sunlight surrounds you.

Pre-departure checklist, personal items to bring: Flashlight, mirror (for reflecting sunlight into holes), 1 liter of fluids, sunscreen, hats, backpacks.

1. Remember that every place that we go has Africanized bees (“killer bees”). Do thoroughly read the link provided about them that can be found on the same form that led you here.
2. While we stop short at a strict dress code, long pants, sturdy hiking boots, a light colored hat, and light colored clothing is strongly suggested. Sun screen is advised. Did you read the killer bee website yet?
3. By design, lunch will not be served until 1 PM. Bring plenty of fluids (one liter each) and snacks to tide you over. You must be able to carry everything you will need until lunch.
4. After the pre-field trip instructions (this guideline letter), we will caravan from the Westward Look to Iron Mine Hill. Maps to Iron Mine Hill will be provided to all drivers. Repp will be the lead vehicle in the caravan, and promises to keep close watch over the caravan.
5. Upon arrival at Iron Mine Hill, groups will be split up and sent to various destinations. See also point 9. (Know your limits!)
6. On the hills where HESU are known to exist, the guides have been instructed to keep all who are interested in seeing any HESU in a tight group once the group is close to the HESU Zone. Please cooperate with the guides at all times!
7. HESU have good vision and eyesight. Should you be fortunate enough to see one basking, take the photo quickly! They move back into their shelters quickly.
8. When a viewed HESU is holed up, you may approach, one at a time, to no closer than 3 feet with your camera. Please do not talk into the hole. Please do not blind them with mirrors or flashlights. (We are trying not to scare them away).
9. Please know your limitations with hiking. If you even think the terrain is too rough at any stop, keep a friend with you, and search the lower ground. **Know where the vehicles are at all times**, and be aware of what time your group plans on leaving any given spot. And remember—there are more than HESU in the places you will go—especially tortoises!
10. Know that eventually, each group will have a shot at known HESU lairs. At the proper time, your guides will lead you to the lunch spot. Once we eat, we will have time to figure out who has yet to see a wild HESU, and give it another shot!
11. A Gila Monster will be brought for those who wish to photograph one in a scenic backdrop at our lunch stop.

12. Right after lunch, Repp will ask for a show of hands for those who have yet to see a wild HESU for the first time. Whether you are a 1 or a 3 on the hiking scale, Repp will get you to the places where they may be.

By 4:00 PM, all will be leaving from the lunch stop and heading for the Westward Look. All must be signed out. Nobody leaves until every name is that is on the sign in sheet is on the sign out sheet. Thanks.