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# Tortoise Tracks

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The Desert Tortoise Preserve Committee, Inc.

Spring 2001 21:1

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The Mojave aster (*Xylorhiza tortifolia*) is a hardy desert perennial with flowers that can vary from violet to lavender to almost white. The usual habitat for this species is largely creosote scrub community. In April/May a Mojave aster may produce as many as 20 blooms. Photographed at the DTNA by Laura Stockton.

## 26<sup>th</sup> Annual General Meeting and Awards Banquet Held in Palmdale

The 26th Annual General Meeting was held January 20, 2001 at the Holiday Inn in Palmdale, California. Eighty-three DTPC supporters turned out for the afternoon and evening events. The afternoon business session featured reports on current DTPC activities, financial reports and plans for the future.

The evening Annual Banquet featured UCLA biologist Ken Nagy, who gave a delightful presentation on a distant cousin of the desert tortoise, namely the Uzbek tortoise, *Testudo horsfieldii*. Ken did a great job explaining the physiology underlying the biological differences between the desert and Uzbek tortoises while keeping the audience's attention throughout. He finished up with his wonderful videos of *Testudo horsfieldii* in the wild.

## YEAR 2000 DTPC AWARDS

### Golden Tortoise Honorees

Tracy Goodlett and Glenn Goodlett

*For their long-term and significant contributions to the Desert Tortoise Preserve Committee.*

### Award Recipients

Chuck Mueller-*For excellence in desert reporting.*

Daniel Patterson and The Center for Biological Diversity-*For their highly effective efforts to protect the tortoise and other wildlife.*

Mickey Quillman-*For his encouragement and support of desert research beyond the borders of the NTC.*

Dr. Thadius Thorson - *For providing medical services to help desert wildlife.*

Johanna Wald, Natural Resources Defense Council - *For outstanding contributions to the protection of the desert tortoise and desert lands.*

## ANNUAL SPRING WORK PARTY

The Desert Tortoise Preserve Committee's Annual Spring Work Party will be held the weekend of April 7-8, 2001. These work parties provide a wonderful opportunity for volunteers to become intimately acquainted with tortoise habitat.

Held in the spectacular Mojave Desert, this fun and rewarding event should be more exciting than ever. Due to popular demand, this year's spring work party has been scheduled later than usual. Attendees will be able to enjoy the spring flowering season and perhaps even get to see active tortoises!

Work projects are planned for both the Desert Tortoise Natural Area and for the Pilot Knob allotment. Participants are invited to enjoy the traditional Saturday evening campfire and overnight campout at the remote Blackwater Well site, a special treat for anyone who loves the desert.

Work party volunteers will need to bring work gloves; stout shoes or walking boots; hats and sunscreen; drinking water; food; flashlights; appropriate clothing and camping equipment if staying overnight.

If you are interested in joining the work party on one or both days, please register by calling Michael Connor at (909) 683-3872 or e-mail him at <dtpc@pacbell.net>.

## LEO NOWAK - IN MEMORIAM

Leo Nowak, longtime active supporter of the desert tortoise and the Desert Tortoise Preserve Committee passed away January 6, 2001. He died at his home in Inyokern at the age of 93.

Leo was a self-taught commercial artist who began his career as one of the original Superman Comics illustrators. After serving as a battalion artist during WW II, he moved to Southern California. For 25 years he was the chief illustrator for *Stamps-Conheim Newspaper Advertising Service* in Los Angeles.

Moving to the desert community of Inyokern in the mid-1970s, Leo illustrated political cartoons for *The Daily Independent* in Ridgecrest for 12 years. Desert living initiated an active and productive interest in painting Western landscapes and subjects in oil on canvas. His paintings have been exhibited throughout the United States, Australia and New Zealand.

Leo and his wife, Gloria became active fundraisers for the Desert Tortoise Preserve (now called the Desert Tortoise Natural Area) after joining the Committee in 1975. The couple lectured at clubs and organizations about the need to protect the desert tortoise and its habitat, while caring for injured tortoises at home.

Gloria, who died in 1995, was the original editor of Tortoise Tracks producing the first issue in 1979. Leo donated his artistic skills to the Committee by creating drawings including the newsletter's original logo, and illustrating

*Leo Nowak - (Continued on page 7)*



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### The Desert Tortoise Preserve Committee, Inc.

**Michael J. Connor** Executive Director  
**Mary Shepherd** Newsletter Editor

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## **REVIEW OF DTPC's ACCOMPLISHMENTS & ACTIVITIES IN THE YEAR 2000**

### **Public Policy**

The desert tortoise, the California State Reptile, is listed as threatened under both Federal and State Endangered Species Acts. Significant interaction and coordination with government agencies is essential to Desert Tortoise Preserve Committee (DTPC) land acquisition and management efforts. The DTPC holds an annual coordination meeting with the Bureau of Land Management (BLM). The Executive Director is a member of the Bureau's Ridgecrest Resource Area Steering Committee, which meets monthly.

The DTPC works to protect the interests of the desert tortoise and its habitat in the desert southwest through the US Department of Interior, BLM's ongoing desert planning efforts particularly the Northern and Eastern Colorado (NECO) planning process and the West Mojave Plans. The DTPC is an active participant in the NECO planning process. NECO encompasses 5% of the land area of the entire state of California including parts of Imperial, Riverside and San Bernardino Counties. The DTPC Executive Director is a member of the West Mojave HCP Steering Committee. The West Mojave HCP planning area includes parts of Inyo, Kern, Los Angeles, Riverside and San Bernardino Counties.

### **Public Education**

#### Mojave Desert Discovery Centers

The Mojave Desert Discovery Centers (MDDC) are multi-media interpretive kiosks that DTPC designed and fabricated, and is installing at visitor centers in the Mojave Desert.

Implementation of this innovative approach to environmental education began during the year 2000 with the opening of three MDDC kiosks. Two were installed in California. One at the California Welcome Center, Tanger Outlet Mall, Barstow; the other at the Cottonwood Visitor Center, Joshua Tree National Park. A third kiosk was installed in Nevada at the Nevada State Museum, Las Vegas. Installation of the three multi-media MDDC kiosks culminates five years of effort and the raising of \$82,000 in funds.

#### Educational Materials

Six thousand copies of the DTPC's educational brochures *The Threatened Desert Tortoise*, *The Desert Tortoise Natural Area*, and DTNA Trail Guides were distributed to the public in 2000. *Life Cycle of the Desert Tortoise* posters and other DTPC materials were distributed to schools in California.

#### Web Site

The Committee's web site at <<http://www.tortoise-tracks.org>> features information on the Mojave Desert, desert tortoise biology, desert tortoise conservation and a virtual tour of the Desert Tortoise Natural Area. In 2000, this highly educational site had over 370,000 hits, a 53% increase in visitation over 1999. The web site attracts large numbers of students and others researching the desert tortoise.

#### **Volunteerism**

Volunteers devoted over 3,590 hours to help the Desert Tortoise Preserve Committee. Volunteer activities included producing and distributing *Tortoise Tracks*, membership mailings, board meeting attendance, monitoring and conducting surveys at the Pilot Knob allotment and DTNA, product sales, research, regular patrols of the DTNA perimeter fence, and the spring and fall work parties.

#### **Environmental Education and Outreach**

##### Desert Tortoise Natural Area Naturalist Program

For 12 years, the DTPC has funded Naturalists to provide interpretive services at the DTNA each spring. From 30 March - 9 June, 2000, Lou Silva and Mark Clark served as the DTNA Naturalists. During this time, 324 visitor groups totaling 1039 individuals were recorded at the Interpretive Center – nearly twice as many visitors as in 1999. First time visitors accounted for 59.1% of 71 respondents to a visitor survey. The DTNA was the sole destination for 29.6% of those visitors. Fifty-eight visitor groups saw at least one tortoise. Of the 155 groups that did not see a tortoise the most common reaction was that they would come back another day at a better time to try again.

##### Pilot Knob Allotment

DTPC stationed a Host/Interpreter at Blackwater Well for 68 days from March 17 through June 1, 2000. Host/Interpreter Sterling Kendrick interacted with 89 visitors. There were a total of 149 person-day visits to Blackwater Well facility and the Pilot Knob allotment during 2000. This included spring and fall work party volunteers who cleaned up the Blackwater Well area and removed several tons of trash, removed fallen fencing, marked rocked-in roads to reduce damage to roadside habitat, and worked on habitat restoration in the Grass Valley Wilderness.

##### Educational Presentations at Public Meetings and Fairs

1. Hosted Desert Advisory Council field trip at DTNA, June 9, 2000.
2. Desert Tortoise Council's Tortoise Handling Workshop, Ridgecrest, California
3. California Turtle & Tortoise Club, San Fernando

A&A 2000 – (Continued from page 3)

#### Valley

4. California Turtle & Tortoise Club, Foothill Chapter
5. DTPC Annual Meeting and Banquet, Palmdale
6. California Turtle and Tortoise Club, Chino Chapter
7. California Turtle and Tortoise Club, Inland Empire
8. California Turtle and Tortoise Club, Cen-Val Chapter, Clovis
9. Desert Tortoise Council Annual Symposium, Las Vegas, Nevada – The DTPC Executive Director gave two presentations at the 25th Annual Desert Tortoise Council Symposium.

a. Michael J. Connor – *The Desert Tortoise Preserve Committee – a Quarter Century of Progress.*

b. Michael J. Connor and Kristin H. Berry – *Major Scientific Accomplishments from the Desert Tortoise Research Natural Area.*

#### Land Management and Stewardship

Kern County - The DTPC directly owns 849 acres of desert tortoise critical habitat and manages 240 acres under conservation easement, largely in and around the Desert Tortoise Natural Area. The Committee works directly with the BLM and the State of California in managing and protecting the 39.5 square mile DTNA.

Stewardship activities included two work parties at the DTNA, and a regular fence patrol by DTPC volunteer Chuck Hemingway. In 2000, for the 11th year in a row, the Committee recruited and staffed Naturalists at the DTNA during the spring visitor season.

During 2000, DTPC began developing a new management plan for the DTNA. The initial planning included the production of an interim draft management plan for the DTNA Buffer Zone. The Buffer Zone is tortoise habitat that is a mixture of private and DTPC-owned land that lies between the current DTNA boundary and the Randsburg-Mojave Road.

Antelope Valley - Located in northeastern Los Angeles County, the Antelope Valley includes some of the most threatened and fragmented desert tortoise habitat. The DTPC is working to protect the remaining desert tortoises and their habitat in this at-risk area through involvement of its Executive Director in the multi-agency West Mojave regional planning effort and is working to promote Significant Ecological Area (SEA) designation in critical habitat in Los Angeles County.

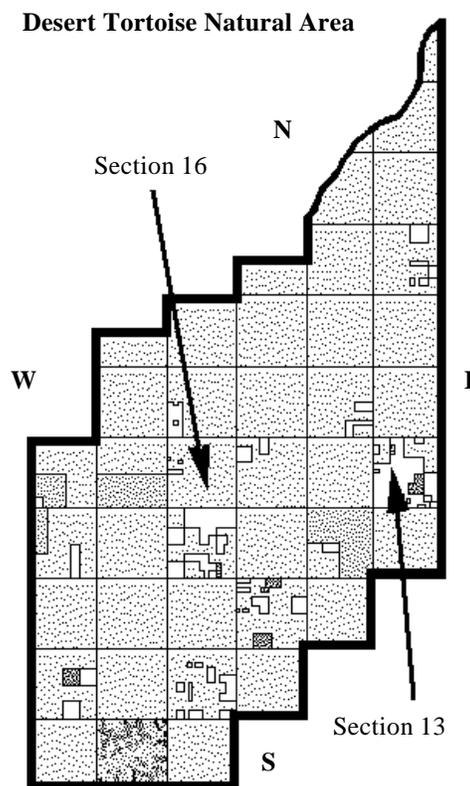
San Bernardino County - The DTPC currently owns 720 acres of desert tortoise habitat, largely in the Superior Cronese critical habitat unit and some in the Fremont-Kramer and Chemehuevi critical habitat units. Since 1995 the Committee has controlled the 42,000-acre Pilot Knob grazing allotment and the associated structures at

Blackwater Well and has been managing the allotment for the benefit of the desert tortoise.

Another San Bernardino County stewardship project involves the installation of tortoise-proof fencing along a critical section of Harper Lake Road. Pursuant to a Memorandum of Understanding between the DTPC and the California Energy Commission, the DTPC has installed 11.4 miles of fencing along Harper Lake Road, Hinkley, California. Desert tortoise-proof fencing has now been erected along 66% of both sides of this critical stretch of road. Engineering plans for culverts for tortoise passage under the road were commissioned and prepared. Contractors to build the culverts have been recruited.

#### Land Acquisition

Kern County – DTPC entered escrow, in fall 2000, for the acquisition of 40 acres of desert habitat at the DTNA. This included 10 acres in section 16 and 30 acres of habitat in the high priority section 13 on the eastern side of the Natural Area. Escrow closed 1/16/01.



Los Angeles County – DTPC opened escrow on a donated 2.5 acre lot inside the southern boundary of the Fremont-Kramer Critical Habitat Unit, which includes some of the most at-risk habitat within the current range of the desert tortoise.

Riverside County – The DTPC is actively acquiring habitat in the fragmented Chuckwalla Bench Area of Critical

A&A 2000 – (Continued on page 5)

**A&A 2000** – (Continued from page 4)

Environmental Concern in the NECO planning area. This area once held the highest known densities of desert tortoise in California's Colorado Desert.

San Bernardino County - The Committee entered into escrow to obtain full title to 3 donated parcels in southwest San Bernardino County. These parcels lie close to the Los Angeles County line and are in the southern end of the highly at-risk Fremont-Kramer unit of designated critical habitat.

#### **Mitigation Land Bank**

During 2000, the DTPC developed and signed an implementation agreement with the City of Palmdale and the California Department of Fish and Game regarding acquisition and enhancement of 100 acres of replacement desert tortoise and Mohave ground squirrel habitat in Kern County. Escrow was initiated in December 2000.

#### **Research**

##### Mohave Ground Squirrel Survey

In 2000, three sites on the Pilot Knob allotment were surveyed for the second successive year for the state-threatened Mohave ground squirrel and other sensitive species for a research project funded by the DTPC with support from the California Energy Commission. Sensitive species found included Mohave ground squirrels, Townsend's big-eared bat, and abundant numbers of horned lark, Le Conte's thrasher, and loggerhead shrikes.

##### Livestock Grazing and Alien Annual Plants at Pilot Knob

The DTPC acquired control of the Pilot Knob allotment specifically to enhance recovery of the tortoise population by eliminating the impact of cattle grazing. Taking advantage of the opportunity afforded by the removal of cattle from the desert, the Weeds of the West Research Program, Biological Resources Division of the USGS has established eight study sites to evaluate areas intensively used by livestock as foci for the establishment and invasion of alien plant species.

#### **Organizational Development**

The Annual General Meeting was held January 19, 2000 at the Holiday Inn in Palmdale, California. This day-long event was attended by 104 supporters who gathered to celebrate the 25th anniversary of the founding of the DTPC. Featured were reports on DTPC activities and a special presentation by Dr. Kristin Berry entitled *25 Years of Research at the Desert Tortoise Natural Area*.

In spring 2000, the DTPC was awarded a grant of computer hardware and software worth \$5,615 by the Conservation Technology Support Program for the acquisition of GIS capability to improve land management capacities.



## **DESERT TORTOISE RELATED UPDATES AND NEWS RELEASES**

Vital actions and legal decisions that will affect the future of the desert tortoise in California are being made now. This list includes some long-standing issues that have recently been resolved and some new activities to protect the desert tortoise and its habitat.

#### **Desert Tortoise Council Symposium**

The Tucson Symposium was a great success, with some really exciting sessions and stimulating discussions. The program is available on the DTC's website and the meeting abstracts should be coming shortly. Next year's symposium will be held in sunny Palm Springs, California.

<<http://www.deserttortoise.org>>

#### **NECO Plan**

The long awaited draft EIS management plan for California's Northern and Eastern Colorado Desert (NECO) desert tortoise recovery units was released by the BLM on February 26, 2001 with a 90-day comment period.

It is critical to the future of the tortoise not just in the NECO planning area but in the West Mojave and other planning areas that this draft plan be modified to fully implement the recommendations of the 1994 Desert Tortoise Recovery Plan. The 90-day comment period is an important opportunity for you to make your views felt.

Copies of the NECO management plan are available on the BLM's web site at:

<[http://www.ca.blm.gov/cdd/draft\\_neco\\_plan\\_eis.html](http://www.ca.blm.gov/cdd/draft_neco_plan_eis.html)>

#### **Fort Irwin Expansion**

As required under the Feinstein/Lewis Fort Irwin expansion rider legislation, the Key Elements document which outlines the terms of the proposed expansion and its timetable was released in January. If you have not seen this, a PDF version available on the BLM web site at:

<[http://www.ca.blm.gov/cdd/fort\\_irwin\\_links.html](http://www.ca.blm.gov/cdd/fort_irwin_links.html)>

#### **CDCA Lawsuit Settlement – CBD Press Release**

On March 20, 2001, recognizing the desert agreements as "within the public interest" and "fair, equitable and reasonable," Judge William Alsup, U.S. District Judge for the Northern District of California, approved the lawsuit settlement signed January 17 between the Center for Biological Diversity, Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility, Sierra Club and the U.S. Bureau of Land Management (BLM). The judge issued his final order in favor of the plaintiffs and approved the remaining two stipulations, one covering protections for Peninsular Ranges bighorn sheep, and another broad agreement to protect 24 species and their habitat desert-wide. The Bush Interior Department as well as off-road vehicle & multiple use group interveners had earlier signed stipulations to protect the California Desert Conservation Area (CDCA).

The Judge's signature on the settlement transforms the settlement from a statement of what the Bureau of Land Management should be doing to protect endangered species to a statement of what it must be doing," said Elden Hughes, a

Updates/News – (Continued on page 6)

**Updates/News – (Continued from page 5)**

longtime California desert champion and Chair of the Sierra Club Desert Committee.

The Virginia-sized CDCA harbors 24 endangered species and over 100 species of concern. It includes 11 million acres of BLM land representing the Sonoran, Mojave and Great Basin ecosystems in some of the California desert's most scenic areas in San Diego, Los Angeles, Imperial, Riverside, San Bernardino, Kern, Inyo and Mono Counties.

The judge's approving order and all full settlement details and documents are on-line at:

<<http://www.biologicaldiversity.org/swcbd/goldenstate/cdca/index.html>>

**CBD Files Contempt of Court Motion over BLM's Failure to Implement the Terms of the Grazing Stipulation that was Agreed to as Part of the CDCA Lawsuit Settlement on 3/29/01 – [CBD Press Release](#)**

Exactly 2 months since the court approved a negotiated desert grazing agreement between the Center for Biological Diversity, Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility (PEER), the Sierra Club and the U.S. Bureau of Land Management (BLM), the BLM still has done nothing to comply with the consent decree to reduce livestock grazing on public land to protect the desert tortoise. After repeated failed attempts to get BLM to comply, the plaintiffs filed a contempt motion against BLM with Judge William Alsup in Federal Court.

The carefully negotiated California Desert Conservation Area (CDCA) grazing settlement helps implement the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service's 1994 Desert Tortoise Recovery Plan recommendations for livestock reduction and removal from critical habitat. Cattle and sheep mow down spring annual plants essential to tortoise health and reproduction. The hooved livestock also trample burrows, killing tortoises inside or wrecking their homes. "The desert tortoise only has four months in which to eat all it's going to eat for the year, and those months are now," said Elden Hughes, a longtime desert conservation champion with the Sierra Club.

The CDCA settlement was negotiated to aid desert tortoise recovery by preventing grazing on 285,381 acres of critical and 213,281 acres of essential tortoise habitat during biologically important spring and fall seasons (March 1-June 15 & Sept. 7-Nov. 7). The agency further agreed to allow no grazing year-round on an additional 11,079 acres of active allotments. BLM has blatantly ignored the March 1 deadline it agreed to in December.

If the court finds the BLM to be in contempt, the court can impose a fine upon the BLM, imprison agency personnel or both to coerce compliance with its lawful orders.

**Tortoise Groups Give Awards to CBD– [CBD Press Release](#)**

The Center for Biological Diversity was awarded on March 17 by two prominent science organizations for its outstanding work benefiting desert tortoise conservation and recovery. The awards were presented to Daniel Patterson, The Center's Desert Ecologist, at the 26th Annual Desert Tortoise Symposium, held at the Inn Suites Hotel in Tucson, Arizona .

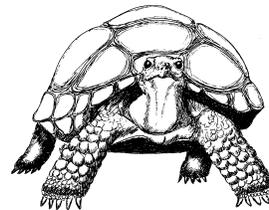
annual banquet with a special award for its legal victories bringing on-the-ground protection for the tortoise. DTC was established in 1976 to promote conservation and recovery of the desert tortoise in the deserts of the southwestern United States and Mexico. DTC's influential board of directors includes several prominent federal biologists and members of the desert tortoise recovery team.

The Desert Tortoise Council recognizes The Center for Biological Diversity for its continued efforts attempting to save the desert tortoise from extinction, "said Dr. Marc Graff, DTC's Senior Co-Chair. Specifically, we recognize the Center's longstanding efforts for conservation throughout the southwest and the nation."

The Desert Tortoise Preserve Committee (DTPC) honored the Center and its Desert Ecologist Daniel Patterson for winning greater tortoise protection. DTPC, a group of similar prestige, was formed in 1974 to promote the welfare of the desert tortoise in its native wild state. The Committee was instrumental in establishing the over 25,000 acre Desert Tortoise Research Natural Area in Kern County, California. "We recognize the key role that the Center has played in persuading government agencies to enforce their own rules and regulations on the land that they manage," said Dr. Michael Connor, Executive Director of the DTPC. "The threatened tortoise is a direct beneficiary of the recent settlement between the Center and BLM. The species will also benefit from fresh impetus placed on efforts to ensure recovery of the tortoise in California."

Over the last few years, the Center has helped increase wildlife and ecosystem protection across the Sonoran, Mojave and Great Basin deserts within the California Desert Conservation Area, which contains 3.4 million acres of tortoise critical habitat and harbors 23 other endangered species.

Through a series of administrative appeals, scientific petitions, and lawsuits, the Center has helped increase protection for the tortoise by: protecting 1.9 million acres from livestock grazing; ceasing new and expanded mining on 3.5 million acres including closure of the largest active mine in the National Park System; banning off-road vehicles from 550,000 acres; closing 4,500 miles of harmful roads on 874,000 acres; compelling the BLM to complete ecosystem management plans; and elevating conservation management of the desert to make wildlife, wilderness, clean water and quiet the top priorities.



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The Desert Tortoise Council (DTC) honored the Center at its

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The DTPC is an IRS recognized tax-exempt 501 (c)(3) nonprofit corporation. All contributions above the basic \$15 annual membership dues are tax-deductible to the full extent allowed by law.

All members and donors receive the quarterly newsletter *Tortoise Tracks*.

Membership and donor information are kept confidential and will not be disclosed to third parties.

**I WANT TO VOLUNTEER**

My area of interest/expertise is:

\_\_\_\_\_

My e-mail address is:

\_\_\_\_\_

**New Trustee Elected to the DTPC Board**

Mark Massar was elected to the Desert Tortoise Preserve Committee's Board of Trustees at the January 20, 2001 Annual Meeting.

Mark is a wildlife biologist working for Charis Corporation at Fort Irwin. He received his degree in Natural Resource Management from the University of California, Berkeley. He has extensive experience conducting biological surveys, including surveys for the desert tortoise and other desert reptiles.

Welcome aboard, Mark!

**Leo Nowak** – (Continued from page 2)

brochures and educational displays.

His work continues to educate the public about the desert tortoise and the necessity to actively preserve its habitat through the informational panels at the Natural Area's Interpretive Center kiosk and via his *Life Cycle of the Desert Tortoise* poster.

You may view the poster on the DTPC's web site at: <<http://www.tortoise-tracks.org>>.



The original Tortoise Tracks logo by Leo Nowak.



# Tortoise Tracks

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## **DISCOVER TORTOISES AT THE DESERT TORTOISE NATURAL AREA**

The recent rains make this a good year to see flowers and maybe even desert tortoises at the Desert Tortoise Natural Area (DTNA) located in southeastern Kern County, less than a 2-hour drive from downtown Los Angeles. For the twelfth consecutive year, a Desert Tortoise Preserve Committee Naturalist will be on duty at the DTNA to answer questions about the tortoises and other wildlife, and to help visitors appreciate the desert environment.

The Naturalist recommends that visitors bring drinking water, a hat, sunscreen, and sturdy walking shoes to take full advantage of the short self-guided nature trails. Optimal time to locate tortoises and other wildlife is from 8-11 A.M. Call (909) 683-3872 to schedule a Naturalist guided tour or for more information.

The DTNA is located 5 miles north of California City just off the Randsburg-Mojave Road. A signed, short dirt road leads to a small parking area at the Interpretive Center. Here, the Desert Tortoise Preserve Committee's "Desert Tortoise Discovery Center" is on site until May 31, 2001.

Educational displays feature information on the tortoise as well as Mojave rattlesnakes, lizards, insects, black-tailed hares, kit foxes, and ravens. Desert Tortoise Preserve Committee fundraising products are available, including T-shirts, hats, books, and post cards.

Year-round facilities include a bathroom for visitor use, an interpretive kiosk, and self-guided nature trails. The nature trails consist of a plant loop and an animal loop, each approximately 0.5 miles long, and a shorter main loop. The three trails have numbered interpretive trail posts with corresponding trail guides. There is also a 1.75 mile discovery loop trail.

The DTNA Naturalist is provided by the Desert Tortoise Preserve Committee, with support from the Bureau of Land Management. The Bureau of Land Management designated the DTNA as a Research Natural Area and Area of Critical Environmental Concern in 1980. The DTNA was founded in 1974.

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