

# The Desert Tortoise Council Newsletter Winter 1998

OUR 23rd YEAR

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

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## FEATURED SPEAKERS AND SESSIONS FOR 23rd ANNUAL DESERT TORTOISE COUNCIL SYMPOSIUM ANNOUNCED

The 23rd Annual Desert Tortoise Council Symposium is scheduled for Friday, April 3 through Sunday, April 5, 1998 at the InnSuites Hotel in Tucson, Arizona. A field trip to Saguaro National Park will be scheduled for Monday, April 6, 1998.

### SPECIAL SESSION:

The 1998 program has several very special visitors and guests, including Drs. Kim Hunter, Janice Bowers, Joe McAuliffe, Art Gibson, and Walt Whitford. There will be a special half-day session on creosote bushes and other perennial shrubs and their numerous roles in the stability and well-being of desert ecosystems. Six speakers will present the latest information on a wide variety of topics, including the genetics and biogeography of the species; creosote bushes as nutritional islands; demography and longevity of desert perennial shrubs; and effects of military maneuvers and dust on the shrubs.

### BRING MONEY FOR BOOKS:

Fabulous books by several well-known and famous speakers featured during our special sessions will be available for purchase. Books by botanist and vegetation specialist Janice Bowers, a book edited by Tom VanDevender on packrat middens and the wealth of knowledge they hold, and a book by Tom VanDevender on Arizona grasslands. Robert Webb has a fabulous book comparing photographs taken in the Grand Canyon in 1889- 90 with photographs at identical sites in 1990.

### BOOK SIGNING:

We will have a special book signing event by the authors on late Saturday afternoon, prior to the banquet.

### BANQUET SPEAKER:

Dr. Robert Webb, a brilliant, enthusiastic, and stimulating speaker, will share his experiences with rephotographing desert sites to compare changes in vegetation, geomorphology, and land uses over time. His

recent Grand Canyon book is a real treat to read. Bob has been with us before, and you may remember his landmark book with Howard Wilshire on environmental effects of off-road vehicles.

### FEATURED SPEAKERS:

Richard Hunter will present new data on alien annual plants and fire from research undertaken in Nevada. Dr. Tom VanDevender will speak on "Evolutionary Implications of Ice Age Climates for the Desert Tortoise." Dr. Graham Kerley from the University of Port Elizabeth, South Africa, will tell us about the ecology and behavior of angulate tortoises. Dr. Tully from the National Institutes of Health and a senior scientist in the field of mycoplasmas, will present a paper on the expanding role of mycoplasmas in respiratory diseases of man and animals and will tell us about his research during this last year on the ticks living on desert tortoises.

The Nutrition Session chaired by Drs. Brian Henen and Olav Oftedal on Nutrition features a paper by Dr. Mary Allen titled, "Cattle, Dung and Tortoises: Symbiosis?" Where are you, Vern Bostick and Resource Concepts?

The University of Florida contingent, including Elliott Jacobson and Bruce Homer will be present. Dr. Isabella Schumacher and Joan Diemer Berish will be presenting papers in the Health and Disease session, as will Dr. Grace McLaughlin, who finished her Ph.D. at the University of Florida and is now working for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in Ventura. The geologists are participating also: Drs. Brenda Houser, Gordon Haxel, and Maurice Chaffee, providing new information on the composition of tortoise shell and the geochemistry of soils where ill tortoises have been found.

Additional sessions will include Research in the National Parks; Effects of Human Activities on Habitat and Tortoise Populations; Physiology, Behavior, and Ecology of Tortoises; and new and unfolding management plans that affect the ecosystem upon which the desert tortoise depends.

## **AUCTION AND RAFFLE:**

Very special large, framed print by Robert Bateman will be available. Ann Christensen is offering a \$500 value of a burrow scope with video. An eclectic collection of t-shirts, books, field items will entice you. Don't forget to visit your ATM machine or bring your checkbook!

## **DETAILS OF 23rd ANNUAL DESERT TORTOISE COUNCIL SYMPOSIUM**

The 23 Annual Desert Tortoise Council Symposium is scheduled for Friday, April 3 through Sunday, April 5, 1998 at the InnSuites Hotel in Tucson, Arizona. A field trip will be scheduled for Monday, April 6, 1998 to Saguaro National Park. InnSuites is located at 475 N. Granada, just off Interstate 10. There are more than one InnSuites in Tucson, so make sure you mention the address correctly.

The room rate is \$69 + tax, single or double occupancy, about \$10 under government per diem. 110 rooms have been blocked for the Desert Tortoise Council at the above rate. You must mention you are with the Desert Tortoise Council Symposium to get this rate. InnSuites has a toll free reservations number, (800) 446-6589. You must make your own reservations with InnSuites. The block of rooms will be **RELEASED** by March 4<sup>th</sup>, 1998 **CHECK EXTENSION**. At that time, your attempts to make reservations will be based upon availability and at the hotel's normal rate.

Check in time is 3:00 p.m., check out, 12:00 noon. Many nonsmoking rooms are available (ask). Rooms come with a variety of amenities. Popcorn and juice is available the first night in all rooms. Coffee makers and complimentary coffee and tea are provided in all rooms. All rooms are equipped with refrigerators and microwaves. Voice mail and ironing boards... and irons are available. A complimentary breakfast buffet and social (cocktail) hour are included with your room. Hair dryers are in each room and an Olympic sized swimming pool beckons the guest.

InnSuites is close to downtown and 6 blocks from the charming historic arts and presidio district. It is 8 miles from the Arizona-Sonora Desert Museum, Old Tucson, and Saguaro National Park- West Unit. InnSuites is also 5 minutes from the University of Arizona.

\$22 is the typical cab fare from the airport, or \$17 for a shuttle service called Arizona Stagecoach. InnSuites is about 20 minutes from the airport. Also relatively easy and cheap (\$0.85) is the Sun Tram (city) bus ride from the airport with one transfer to get to the hotel. Take bus 25 to Ronstadt [yes, same family as Linda] Transit Center and walk or take bus 21,12, or 3 to get to InnSuites.

## **ELECTION OF OFFICERS AT 1998 BUSINESS MEETING ANNOUNCED**

Positions due to be filled this year are Corresponding Secretary and Co-chairperson- elect. Nominees are Ed LaRue, Jr. and Daniel Patterson for each position, respectively. The existing officers have volunteered to run again for these positions. Any additional nominations will be sought at the business meeting to be held at 7:00-8:00 p.m. Thursday night, April 2, at the symposium site.

## **RESEARCH FUNDING TO BE ADDRESSED IN CONGRESS**

The following report was received from the Ecological Society of America. In Congress, several efforts are underway that demonstrate recognition of the importance in federal R&D funding. In November, 1997, Senators Phil Gramm (R-TX), Joseph Lieberman (D-CT), and Pete Domenici (R-NM) introduced S. 1305, "The National Research Investment Act of 1998." The bill seeks to double federal investment in basic scientific, medical, and pre-competitive engineering research over a ten year period beginning in FY '98. The recent changes in the projected revenue outlook, argue the sponsors, give more room to advance such goals within the confines of the balanced budget agreement. Also in November, in an unprecedented show of unity, more than 100 scientific and engineering societies supported a unified statement on research challenging Congress to double spending on federal research over the next decade. This statement complemented S. 1305 and culminated in a Capitol Hill press conference where the Senators introduced their legislation, flanked by some 35 scientific society presidents. Meantime, a House-version of S. 1305 is in the works and the original sponsors of S. 1305 are looking for additional Senate co-sponsors. These bills mainly serve to give visibility to the issue of federal investment in R&D, but there are signs that the sentiment may be backed up with dollars. While some

in Congress have been calling for greater emphasis on research funding, the White House has remained fairly quiet on the issue, noting the need to adhere to the balanced budget agreement. Yet, in a speech the President gave last month he noted that, "half our economic growth in the last half-century has come from technological innovation and the science that supports it." Recent indications suggest that, apparently in response to efforts bringing attention to federal R&D, the Administration may go beyond keeping science budgets flat. Clinton has indicated that he may ask for a substantial increase for the biomedical field. A recent intense letter-writing campaign by many in the science community seems to have been the impetus for a plan by the Administration to ask for a nine percent increase in the National Science Foundation's budget. The idea is to cover the additional costs with the proposed tobacco settlement. However, it should be noted that the tobacco settlement is far from certain and that many groups are opposed to using money from it for anything other than efforts to reduce smoking. It is less clear how the President will come out on other science spending.

## **ONGOING COUNCIL PROJECTS**

This winter, your Council representatives

- are providing comments on a variety of agency projects affecting the desert tortoise, including the Ord Mountain Pilot Study for OHV route designations and OHV policy in DWMAs;

- are implementing our World Wide Web site which can be found under construction at <http://www.desert-tortoise.org> (Suggestions are appreciated);

- completed a brochure on the Desert Tortoise Council, Inc., which will be available at the symposium, by mail, and on our web site;

- are finalizing an update of Answering Questions About Desert Tortoises: A Guide for People Who Work With the Public. This version will encompass both Mojave and Sonoran desert tortoises. We intend to print thousands copies and also make it available on our web site.

## **SYMPOSIUM PHOTO CONTEST**

Along with our new print and voting format, we hope to have a mix of old and new faces as winners. First Place winners win \$25.00 and Best of Show wins an extra \$25.00.

We will accept mounted prints this year, not slides. This will allow attendees to view the photos and vote on their favorites. **ENTRY DEADLINE IS 12:00 noon, APRIL 3, 1998.** The Council is sponsoring the annual contest to honor and encourage our members to participate in educating the public through photography.

### **AWARDS:**

Qualified winners will be awarded first, second, and third place ribbons in each category and a best of show plaque will be awarded. All first place winners will receive \$25 and the best of show an additional \$25. (The increase from \$20 to \$25 is to make up for the added costs of the Prints.)

### **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

### **RULES:**

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. Prints may be either color or black and white and must be mounted. Each contestant may submit a maximum of two **PRINTS** per category. Photos must have been taken by the contestant and will be judged at the Symposium by the attendees. Attendees will pick up ballots at the registration table and vote Friday and Saturday until noon.

The category "TORTOISE CONSERVATION" is fairly open, but should depict activities or subject matter important in the perpetuation of the species. Examples are research, impacts (i.e. raven predation),

improvements (i.e. fencing), and environmental education.

The back of each PRINT must include the following information:

Category

Common & Scientific Name of Subject

Location, Date PRINT Taken

Contestant's Name, Address, & Phone Number

(No names on the front please, titles & date OK)

PRINTS will not be returned, except upon advance request, and become the property of the Desert Tortoise Council. The Council shall 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.

Contestants may submit entries to Bob Parker on the first day of the symposium before 12:00 noon. Winners need not be present to receive their awards. If you have questions phone (619) 384- 5425 (work), or (619) 446-2001 (home).

### **FIELD TRIP INFORMATION**

A field trip will be scheduled for Monday, April 6, 1998 to Saguaro National Park. Todd Esque and Betsy Wirt will show us the work on desert tortoise ecology that has been accomplished at study sites on the Park. For those of you used to Mojave environments and unfamiliar with the Sonoran desert tortoise, you are in for a treat! You won't think it can be the same animal.