

# Tortoise Group Newsletter

Tortoise Group  
A non-profit organization since 1982

Volume XXV No. 4 September 2012

[www.TortoiseGroup.org](http://www.TortoiseGroup.org)

Las Vegas, Nevada

## Problem Bees - Members' Stories

From Cris Tomlinson

A bee hive completely engulfed the front of Bob's burrow, so I had to dig him out of the back end. As I dug down I was hoping I wouldn't find a tortoise carcass as my tortoise had not been out in over six weeks due to the hive. As I got deeper I heard the faint sound of movement and had more hope my tortoise was alive. Then I finally saw a leg and moved some more soil and let him walk out on his own. Whew!



**Bob devours MegaDiet after a bee hive at the burrow entrance trapped him inside for six weeks. Photo by Cris Tomlinson**

My tortoise was underground for a long time. He couldn't come out due to the hive engulfing the entrance. He was a bit light in weight but immediately drank some water and ate some food and is happy now!

From Teresa Tokumon-Phillips

My husband spotted bees flying in and out of Chuck's burrow. What to do? He got out the shop vac and literally vacuumed up the bees as they were flying. As he got near the end of the burrow, he

was able to capture what he thought was the queen! He must have scared them off, because they haven't returned. What an innovative solution!

## New Homes for Members' Male Tortoises

Five male tortoises have new homes thanks to the recent policy of using members' tortoises for adoption rather than tortoises from the Desert Tortoise Conservation Center. Preference is given first to Life Members, then Members, and finally to nonmembers. Add your tortoise to the list by emailing [KathyUtiger@TortoiseGroup.org](mailto:KathyUtiger@TortoiseGroup.org) or calling 804-0472. A fee of \$10 for members, \$25 for nonmembers.

## When My Tortoise Dies....

Since the desert tortoise is a threatened species, several people have inquired if there are special requirements for handling the remains. A representative of the Nevada Department of Wildlife stated that the custodian may use whichever method he prefers.

## Woman-Power Unleashed to Build Aboveground Burrow

Under the eagle eye of Habitat Specialist Jerry Shupe, Nancy Crenshaw, Leigh Ellis, Linda Robertshaw, and Nancy Nolette volunteered their time and energy on a very hot Saturday morning to put together an aboveground burrow for Bob Prutch and his tortoise. Although it is quite a hefty chore to move 3 tons of soil and shovel it onto a burrow, the women say they had a wonderful time. That's being a volunteer for you! Thank you, ladies.

Matt Hall, owner of Vista Landscaping, donated the soil for this project. Matt will also distribute tortoise information to customers. Thanks for supporting the tortoise, Matt.

## MegaDiet Corner



*Scooter started right out on MegaDiet and is now a healthy 6 years old. By Carin Mayo*

### MegaDiet and Brumation

It's okay to feed your tortoise right up to brumation. Your tortoise will decide how much and when it wants to eat. You will find that your tortoise will eat less and less as it nears brumation.

Check out some of these topics on the [website](#)

- Converting a Tortoise from Vegetables to MegaDiet
- What If My Tortoise Won't Eat MegaDiet?
- When Do I Feed My Tortoise?
- Should I Add Vitamins?

### MegaDiet Tip

Try thinking of MegaDiet as one wonderful, nutritious part of your tortoise's diet rather than a daily meal. When I give MegaDiet only 2-3 times per week, my tortoise chomps it up eagerly rather than walking in it like he often used to do at this time of year.

Think about what your tortoise needs--lots of leafy greens for fiber, and MegaDiet to give the balance of fat, protein, vitamins, and minerals.

### MegaDiet Satellite Sellers

Please call sellers for appointment

Nellis & Owens	Georgi – 459 -1274
Ann & Camino al Norte	Don – 374-2466
Decatur & Gowan	Toni – 277-6179
Smoke Ranch & Jones	Julie – 245-4671
215 & Far Hills	Kathy & Pauline 804-0472

Charleston & Casino Center  
Trilla at Ace Locksmiths: 382-1754

215 & W Tropicana	Athena – 682-0307
215 & S. Decatur	Carolyn – 534-7888 x824 378-6514 cell

Eastern & Windmill	Patsy – 269-7108
215 & S. Eastern	Helene – 878-7877 w 375-7998 cell

Boulder Hwy & Equestrian  
Gail – 334-0015

215 & 95 at Van Wagenen	Peggy – 281-3048
-------------------------	------------------

Boulder City	Carol – 293-6494
--------------	------------------

Pahrump	Sheri – 775-727-5557
---------	----------------------

Kingman, AZ	Toni – 928-757-8317
-------------	---------------------

OnLine Store at:  
<http://www.tortoisegroup.org/sales/intoshop.php>

No computer? Call Susan – 702-458-8382

A 1½ lb bag costing a member \$6.00 lasts a large desert tortoise at least one month.  
MegaDiet is also sold at Tortoise Group meetings.

**40% discount to TG members**

## **Fall Seasonal Behavior**

In Las Vegas, September brought cooler weather and changes in tortoise behavior. Your tortoise should be active and eating, taking on calories and water to prepare for brumation.

**Increased activity:** Tortoises are moving about more, checking out areas of the yard ignored earlier in the year. They seem to have more energy. Males, especially, and some females will do a lot of pacing. It's okay and normal. Be sure to recheck the habitat for any escape hatches.

**Eating habits:** Fall may bring on a change in your tortoise's eating preferences. Mine now likes some dried grasses and leaves. When it was hot your tortoise may not have eaten much, but now the appetite should be excellent. Be sure to offer healthy greens (not lettuce) along with MegaDiet 2-3 times each week. As brumation time approaches, eating will decrease.

**Water and soaking:** Our summer rains give the tortoise a chance to use his innate instinct to drink from little puddles. The tortoise may also soak on its own more (mine does). If not, be sure to give several soaks before brumation.

**Digging:** As brumation time approaches, your tortoise may start hunting for a good spot to winter. It may dig holes and/or want to come inside. This is natural. It doesn't mean that the burrow is inadequate.

**Brumation:** The optimal temperature for tortoise body functioning is about 85°-95°F. At this temperature, a tortoise can browse, find a mate, and digest its food. At lower temperatures, its body does not function, so it has figured a way to wait out that cold period---brumate and use as little energy as possible. In a well-insulated burrow, the tortoise's body will slow down dramatically and preserve precious resources until it's warm enough in spring to begin to eat and digest again.

A combination of sun angle and temperature tell your tortoise when its time to brumate. It will begin to come out less often and also eat less. Your tortoise knows its schedule and what's right. It will enter brumation some time between mid September and early November. Each tortoise has its own schedule. Mark down the last date you see your tortoise so you'll know what to expect next year.



***Murphy browses in a field of flowers. Photo by Joan Biesemeyer***

**Why brumate outside?** The optimal temperature for brumation is 40°-60°F. In a snug, well-insulated burrow, the tortoise will lose very little body moisture through breathing while its heart rate and breathing are highly reduced. Its little body is just ticking over, waiting until the temperatures and sun outside in spring can warm its body up enough that it can function again.

A tortoise kept inside the house where the temperature is above 55°-60°F is baking slowly, losing precious moisture. Loss of moisture is especially dangerous for small tortoises.



## What We Should Know about Salmonella

by Christine Kolmstetter, DVM

The Salmonella bacterium is a normal component of the reptile intestinal tract. What is important to remember is that there are over two thousand different types of Salmonella and not all of them are harmful to humans, although most reptile Salmonella species likely are potentially harmful to humans.

We can check any animal for Salmonella. Typically, we culture the feces. HOWEVER, we generally do not encourage testing of reptiles. Why not? Because we assume that most reptiles are carriers of Salmonella.



***"Suitcase" stands ready to go. His name says that he has everything he needs right inside his shell!***  
Photo by Kathy Minnick

The Salmonella that we get from food poisoning is not the same type that we get from reptiles. Also, not all reptiles have Salmonella, and if they do have their normal Salmonella, they don't always shed it in their feces. Therefore, if we culture the feces and get no Salmonella cultured, that does not mean that they do not have Salmonella.

If the culture indicates Salmonella, we rarely ever try to treat reptile Salmonella with antibiotics. Why not? Because we cannot effectively eliminate

Salmonella from reptiles since it is supposed to be there in the first place. Also if we put them on long term antibiotics, instead of getting rid of the Salmonella, it usually results in mutant types of Salmonella which are potentially much more dangerous to humans.

Humans get Salmonella by ingesting it. Salmonella is most commonly transmitted from a reptile to a human when a child handles a water turtle and then puts his hand in his mouth. Red-eared slider turtles are notorious for shedding Salmonella in their feces and thus into their water. Yes, desert tortoises likely do carry Salmonella, but they are not in water and, therefore, don't generally have the Salmonella feces on their shells.

The Center for Disease Control recommends no reptiles in homes with children under about five years of age. Since small children inevitably put their hands in their mouths, they are at greater risk of exposure. Also the young and the elderly generally have weaker immune systems than a mature healthy adult human, so these groups are more susceptible to getting sick from Salmonella if they are exposed.

I am not aware of any reports of humans getting Salmonella from desert tortoises. However, we have had cases of dogs ingesting the baby tortoises or the feces of tortoises and then becoming very ill. So keeping dogs away from the tortoise area is best for the tortoises and best for the dogs.

I always, always stress to people that they MUST practice good hygiene: 1) wash hands thoroughly after handling any reptile or reptile fecal material and after cage cleaning, and 2) don't clean reptile dishes in the kitchen sink. If there are children in the home, I highly recommend that the adults do the cage cleaning and that they make sure the kids wash hands after handling the pets.

## Ideas and Stories from Members

### Bladder Stones: Member Stories

#### From Victoria Vojdani, *sulcata* owner

Last year a routine exam with Dr Kolmstetter revealed a bladder stone about 1-1 ½ inches in diameter in my then 26-pound *sulcata*, Honu (now 50 pounds!) Dr K advised checking in 6 months for growth. Since I perform reconnection healing on both animals and humans, I naturally did a session with my tortoise. This technique is a form of broad-spectrum energy healing. About a week after the treatment, Honu peed liquid that looked rather like half and half, something I had not seen before. Two days later, when I had stepped away from his cage for only half an hour, a 1-inch stone appeared in his cage. I rushed it to Dr K who confirmed a bladder stone. She was amazed! He had passed the stone. Feel free to contact me if you'd like to learn more [victoriavojdani@gmail.com](mailto:victoriavojdani@gmail.com)



**Honu, a *sulcata*, looking good today! He passed a bladder stone. Photo by Victoria Vojdani**

Note to Members: Be sure to have your tortoise checked by a veterinarian who sees tortoises. Our [Information Sheet](#) gives Las Vegas area vets who say they treat tortoises.

#### From Joan Meyer, Reno

Just wanted to let you know I had surgery done on Ms. Mudd in July for a bladder stone. It was huge!! 2 ½ x 3 ½ x 4 inches!! As big as my fist! Poor

little lady. The incision in her plastron was huge. This vet (who moved to NH!!!) used dental acrylic to seal instead of Bondo. Fascinating! I have pics of the surgery and the stone. She is doing fine, nearly back to normal except for the shell healing, which takes a long time.

### My Tortoises Are Fighting!

Just because tortoises grow up together does not mean that they will not fight. Many emails reflect the heartache of having to give up one, two, or three tortoises when they reached 8 or 9 inches in length (and sexual maturity) and began fighting.

Females fight, males fight, and of course a male and a female will breed and produce scores of unwanted hatchlings. Answer: limit yourself to one tortoise.

### Want to See Inside Your Burrow?

If you have a cell phone that records, tape it to a long pole. Turn on the record, and slide it down the burrow. The light from the phone is just perfect!

Another great method to see in the burrow is to reflect sunlight using a mirror. Refer to our [Information Sheet](#) to perfect your technique.

### Thanks for the Tortoise Tips

Kind readers send volumes of thanks in response to the seasonal Tortoise Tips. If you have a question, please email [info@tortoisegroup.org](mailto:info@tortoisegroup.org) to receive a personal response. We're here to share what we know. And if you have a question, there's a good chance that others want to know the same thing.

### My Tortoise Wasn't Dead After All!

#### From Linda Garcia, Las Vegas

Tortoises have amazing recuperative powers! A neighbor's dog mauled my 10-year-old tortoise. I asked them to bury him, because we all thought he was dead. When he emerged from his shallow grave, you can imagine our surprise! He was only in shock and now he's fine.



## September Meeting

### All General Meetings

1 – 3 pm  
Las Vegas Library  
833 Las Vegas Boulevard North  
Las Vegas, NV 89101  
Right across from Cashman Center



### Ice Cream Sundae Meeting

Saturday, September 22, 1-3 pm  
General Meeting – Open to the Public  
Brumation: What Is It? What Happens?

#### Hatchling Care

By Kathy Utiger, Chairman

How will I know when my tortoise will brumate, what's happening to my tortoise all that time, and how should I prepare? All these and other good questions will be answered.

#### Brief Annual Meeting of Members

Biennial election of officers  
Bylaws revision

#### Quick Tip: Hatchling Care

Special adaptations for hatchlings and also a demonstration of how to brumate your hatchling inside if necessary

MegaDiet and other tortoise items are for sale at all meetings. If you wish a 20# sack, please let us know ahead of time.

Meeting updates by email and on the website

### Annual Meeting in September

A brief annual meeting of the members of Tortoise Group will be a part of the September meeting. The Nominating Committee comprised of Wende Lestelle, Chair, Janina Little and Diane Henry has presented the following slate of officers to the Board of Directors: Nominations will be accepted from the floor.

Chairman	Kathy Utiger
Vice-Chairman	Mayrene Lum-Roberts
Secretary	Sherri Graves
Treasurer	Open

#### Important note

After many years as treasurer, Trilla Newton would like to retire. Please step forward those of you with a treasurer bent. Use your expertise to help Tortoise Group reach the new level of financial competence for which we are striving. Email [kathyutiger@tortoisegroup.org](mailto:kathyutiger@tortoisegroup.org) to learn more about this vital position. Thank you.

The Bylaws Committee of Nancy Nolette and Mayrene Lum-Roberts has worked long and hard to make Tortoise Group's bylaws current and effective. Before the meeting, you can [review the bylaws](#) and the highlighted major changes online.



*Homer zeros in on those tasty cantaloupe sprouts.*  
Photo by Mandy Nicholson

### Volunteer Thank You BBQ

Let's celebrate the wonderful volunteers who are the backbone of Tortoise Group. Besides the MegaDiet Sellers, the Board members, Springs Preserve volunteers, and Adoption Committee, we have MegaDiet Bagging folks, meeting setup and sales helpers, speakers, and people who have helped in an amazing number of ways. Please, all of you, join us:

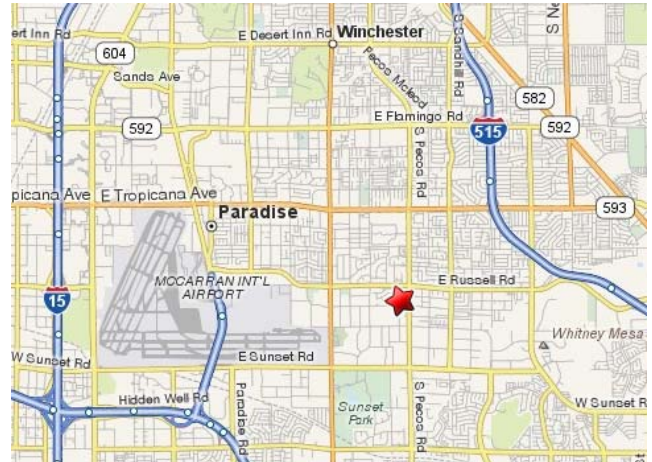
**Saturday, October 20, 3-6 pm**

3271 Shadow Bluff Avenue  
(just west of Pecos, south of Russell)  
Las Vegas 89120  
(SE side of town)  
Home of Secretary, Sherri Graves

**RSVP to Sherri at [sherri376@aol.com](mailto:sherri376@aol.com) with the number attending**

- We'll provide the hamburgers, hot dogs, iced tea, and soft drinks
- We'd love it if you'd bring a dish to share

Don't forget your spouse or significant other; but please leave the kids and booze at home



----- Cut Here -----

### Tortoise Group Membership Form

Memberships and contributions may be tax deductible

#### 1. Please Print the COMPLETE address

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Phone \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_

State \_\_\_\_\_

Zip Code \_\_\_\_\_

E-mail \_\_\_\_\_

#### 2. Check One Newsletter Option      2012

Send my newsletter by e-mail

Send my newsletter in hard copy

#### 3. Check amount you wish for your 1-year membership

( ) \$15   ( ) \$25   ( ) \$35   ( ) \$50   ( ) \$75   ( ) Life \$500

Special Contribution: \_\_\_\_\_

40% discount on MegaDiet and 10% on other Tortoise Group goodies to members and their immediate families

**Make check payable to Tortoise Group. Mail with form to:  
Tortoise Group ♦ 1001 Adobe Flat ♦ Henderson, NV 89011**

**Tortoise Group**  
**PO Box 33866**  
**Las Vegas, NV 89133**  
**702-739-7113**

**Editor** Kathy Utiger

**Board of Directors**

**Officers**

Chairman Kathy Utiger  
Vice-Chairman

Mayrene Lum-Roberts

Secretary Sherri Graves

Treasurer Trilla Newton

**Members**

Laura Deitsch, Wende Lestelle

The Tortoise Group newsletter is  
published four times yearly:  
March, May, July, and September

**Hatchlings Are Popping Out All Over!**

Those adorable little hatchling are making there appearance all over our valley. Of course you want to take home a handful; they're so hard to resist! However, we know better. When you talk to prospective hatchling custodians, please tell them some of these points:



- Hatchlings must live outside and be fed a healthy diet
- Care and feeding information can be found on our website
- Lettuce has no nutrition; hatchling need a diet with calcium
- MegaDiet is available from Satellite Sellers all around town
- An entire section of our care booklet pertains to hatchlings
- Special hatchling housing information is on the website
- More than one tortoise will eventually result in fighting or mating
- You can register the tortoise on the Tortoise Group website

Non Profit Org  
US Postage  
PAID  
Permit 1750  
Las Vegas NV

**Tortoise Group**  
1001 Adobe Flat  
Henderson,  
Nevada  
89011  
RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED