



The TORTOISE BURROW

Newsletter of the
Gopher Tortoise Council

Volume 20, No. 1
Spring-Summer 2000

ALABAMA FLORIDA GEORGIA LOUISIANA MISSISSIPPI SOUTH CAROLINA



Notes from a Co-chair

GEORGE L. HEINRICH

Gopher Tortoise Council officers, committee chairs, and state representatives continued to work on organizing Council activities at the 28 January 2000 business meeting held in Bainbridge, Georgia. Of particular interest was the board's decision to disband the Upland Habitat Protection Project (UHPP). This action was taken after an unsuccessful five-month effort to secure new leadership for the project. It was also decided that all UHPP funds (nearly fourteen thousand dollars) would be donated to The Nature Conservancy, specifically earmarked for the purchase of upland habitat with gopher tortoises on-site and located outside of the state of Florida. I am currently completing that directive and will provide an update in a future issue of this newsletter.

Jeannine Ott agreed to serve as GTC Secretary at the recent business meeting. Thanks Jeannine! We also thank Terri Stilson for having recently served in that position. Please contact Jeannine via e-mail if you would like to receive a copy of the minutes from the January meeting.

I recently attended the first Southeast Regional Meeting of Partners in Amphibian and Reptile Conservation (PARC) along with several other GTC officers and members. The group identified and prioritized regional conservation issues/needs for these two classes of imperiled vertebrates during the three-day meeting held at the Joseph W. Jones Ecological Research Center in southwest Georgia. Strong GTC representation confirmed the Council's commitment to this important conservation initiative. If we cannot improve the outlook for gopher tortoises

and their associated upland ecosystems through PARC, then when can we? I honestly believe that this is our best chance. Please visit the PARC website (www.parcplace.org) or contact me directly if you would like to learn more about this organization and the role you can play.

I had planned to include a final report on last October's Florida turtle symposium in this issue of the newsletter. However, due to a heavy workload, I have not yet found the time to complete that report. Peter Meylan (symposium co-organizer) and I are currently preparing a summary letter for distribution to attendees and other interested parties. I hope to include that letter in the next issue of this newsletter. The good news is that accounting of symposium finances is almost complete and we made a profit of around \$6,000. For those members that were unable to attend the symposium, we have included the abstracts of papers and posters pertaining to gopher tortoises/upland ecosystems in this issue of the newsletter.

There are still several opportunities for GTC members to become involved with Council activities. Please contact Joan Berish, Tracey Tuberville, or myself if you would like information on how you can serve your organization and its cause! With teamwork we can continue to strengthen our efforts toward conserving gopher tortoises and their associated upland ecosystems. Please join us!

George L. Heinrich

Abstracts of Papers and Posters Pertaining to Gopher Tortoises and Upland Ecosystems that were Presented at "A Second Symposium on the Status and Conservation of Florida Turtles"

Papers

Allen, Mike. Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, Office of Environmental Services, 620 S. Meridian Street, Tallahassee, FL 32399, USA.

Gopher Tortoise Protection and Conservation in Florida

Since 1972, Florida has been steadily increasing the level of protection for the state's gopher tortoise population. Once an unregulated game animal, the gopher tortoise is now the center of a regulatory and habitat protection process unlike any other in the nation. The interest in protecting this animal is fueled primarily by alarm over the state's burgeoning growth and development that has caused an 85% loss of native scrub and sandhill communities over the past 30 years.

Land developers in Florida can choose between two distinct permitting processes to resolve tortoise and land development conflicts. The relocation process focuses on humanitarian considerations for the fate of individual tortoises at a development site, but does not address the protection of tortoise habitat. Additionally, relocation has been implicated as a contributing factor to the spread of a respiratory disease identified in certain tortoise populations.

The Incidental Take permitting process focuses on the issue of habitat protection for the tortoise. Developers seeking an Incidental Take permit can choose between several options to provide the required amount of habitat protection, including 1) on-site protection, 2) donation of suitable habitat adjacent to other public lands, and 3) purchase of mitigation credits from the Mitigation Park program.

For economic reasons, use of the Mitigation Park program has been the most popular option among developers. Funds received through the Mitigation Park program are used to acquire large tracts of gopher tortoise habitat that are titled to a state or local government, open to the public, and managed with funds that accumulate within a designated trust fund. Since its inception ten years ago, the Mitigation Park program has received more than \$15 million dollars and acquired over 7,000 acres of gopher tortoise habitat.

Berish, Joan Diemer. Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, Wildlife Research Laboratory, 4005 S. Main Street, Gainesville, FL 32601-9099, USA.

Effects of Upper Respiratory Tract Disease on Gopher Tortoise Populations

Within the last decade, research has revealed the existence of an upper respiratory tract disease (URTD) in wild gopher tortoises in Florida. This disease is highly contagious and is transmitted by close contact between tortoises. Clinical signs include nasal discharge, ocular discharge, swollen eyelids, and conjunctivitis. One causal agent of URTD is *Mycoplasma agassizii*. Because these bacteria can be difficult to culture, a blood test has been developed to detect antibodies to *M. agassizii*. Blood samples collected at various sites in Florida have indicated exposed tortoise populations in 23 of Florida's 67 counties.

In 1998, the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission initiated a radiotelemetry study to investigate the effects of URTD on gopher tortoise populations on public lands. A total of 61 tortoises was radio-instrumented on 3 URTD study sites and a control site. Because the current blood test only indicates exposure to mycoplasma, nasal lavages were also taken to detect the presence of mycoplasma. A different mycoplasma was detected on each of the 3 URTD study sites: *Mycoplasma agassizii* on Gold Head Branch State Park, a genetically distinct mycoplasma on Cecil Field Naval Air Station, and an undescribed mycoplasma on Perry Oldenburg Mitigation Park. No exposed or diseased tortoises have been found to date on the control site, Big Shoals Wildlife Management Area.

Recapture efforts in 1999 revealed that 2 of 15 radioed tortoises at Oldenburg had died outside their burrows; a third tortoise with signs of URTD was necropsied. Within the last year, over 100 dead tortoises have been found at Oldenburg. One of 15 radioed tortoises at Cecil Field was found dead in its burrow. Continued monitoring will document mortality rates and changes in serology over time.

Brown, Daniel R. Dept. of Pathobiology, Box 110880, University of Florida, Gainesville, FL 32611-0880, USA.

Diagnostic Tests for Tortoise Upper Respiratory Tract Disease

The bacterium *Mycoplasma agassizii* was shown by experimental infection studies to be an etiologic agent of a chronic upper respiratory tract disease (URTD) of tortoises. Complementary culture, DNA-based (PCR), and immunological (ELISA) tests for *M. agassizii* were developed to assess risk factors for development and transmission of URTD. The diagnostic tests are based on different principles, and differ in the types of samples required, cost, and interpretation. The tests were validated in three controlled experimental infection cohort studies including a total of 43 infected and 23 control adult desert and gopher tortoises. Test parameters evaluated were: sensitivity, or "if a tortoise is infected, will it test positive?"; specificity, or "if a tortoise is not infected, will it test negative?"; positive predictive value (PPV), or "if a tortoise tested positive, was it really infected?"; and negative predictive value, or "if a tortoise tested negative, was it really not infected?" The rate of false positives was 0% for culture and PCR, and 0-27% for ELISA. The rate of false negatives was 0-17% for culture, 0-20% for ELISA, and 36-63% for PCR. Importantly, these values varied at different sampling times post-infection.

The variation may reflect, in part, the progression of URTD: 1) establishment of mycoplasmosis, 2) non-specific host responses which reduce the population of mycoplasma and simultaneously cause illness and signs of disease, 3) relaxed host responses after the mycoplasma population is reduced or host defenses become exhausted, and 4) re-expansion of the mycoplasma population after host defenses relax. Culture and PCR can be more sensitive than ELISA for diagnosis early in the infection (2 to 8 weeks post-exposure), because time is required for a tortoise to respond immunologically. The ELISA can be more sensitive than culture and PCR for diagnosis in later stages of infection if the host responses decrease mycoplasma numbers. When comparing populations, test parameters also may vary with the true prevalence of infection: when prevalence is high the risk of false negatives increases, and when prevalence is low the risk of false positives increases. Clinical signs of URTD are strong predictors (PPV= 0.84) that a tortoise will be seropositive, however, seropositive status is not as strong a predictor that a tortoise will develop URTD. The greatest risk of transmission of mycoplasmal URTD is from symptomatic, culture-positive, or PCR-positive tortoises. Seropositive status is also a significant risk factor for transmitting URTD.

Burrige, Michael J. Department of Pathobiology, College of Veterinary Medicine, University of Florida, P.O. Box 110880, Gainesville, FL 32611-0880, USA.

Threat to Native Turtles in Florida of Exotic Ticks Imported on Reptiles

A recent study was undertaken to determine the extent of introduction of exotic ticks into Florida on imported reptiles. Exotic ticks were identified from premises in 18 counties of Florida on a variety of tortoises, snakes, and lizards. They belonged to four *Amblyomma* species (*A. marmoreum*, *A. nuttalli*, *A. sabanerae*, and *A. sparsum*) and four *Aponomma* species (*A. exornatum*, *A. flavomaculatum*, *A. latum*, and *A. varanensis*). All four *Amblyomma* species are primarily ticks of tortoises and one, the African tortoise tick (*A. marmoreum*), is enormous in size, with engorged females reaching 30 mm in length and 4 gm in weight. Already *A. marmoreum* ticks have been found to be established on one reptile-breeding facility in central Florida. The impact of these exotic ticks on native turtles in Florida is unknown, but the potential for very negative impacts is very real if the exotic ticks become established on native reptiles. Clearly there is an urgent need to control importation and dissemination of these exotic reptilian ticks.

Forys, Elizabeth A.¹, Craig R. Allen², Deborah M. Epperson³, and Daniel P. Wojcik.⁴ ¹Environmental Studies, Nat. Sci. Collegium, Eckerd College, 4200 54th Avenue S., St. Petersburg, FL 33711; ²U.S. Geol. Surv., Biol. Res. Div., SC Coop. Fish and Wildl. Res. Unit, Clemson Univ., SC 29634; ³Mississippi Nat. Heritage Prog., MS Dept. Wildlife, Fisheries and Parks, Camp Shelby Training Site, Camp Shelby, MS 39407; ⁴U.S. Dept. Agr., Agr. Research. Service, Ctr for Medical, Agricultural, and Veterinary Entomology, Gainesville, FL 32605.

Potential Impacts from Red Imported Fire Ants on Turtles

The red imported fire ant (*Solenopsis invicta*) was inadvertently introduced into the United States at the port of Mobile, Alabama around 1930 and rapidly spread to many southeastern states and Puerto Rico. Red imported fire ants have been observed foraging in several species of turtle nests in Florida including those of loggerhead (*Caretta caretta*), green turtle (*Chelonia mydas*), and gopher tortoise (*Gopherus polyphemus*). *Solenopsis invicta* are attracted to mucous and moisture, and may establish foraging tunnels into turtle nests shortly after egg-laying, making pipping turtles vulnerable to predation. To test the potential impact of *S. invicta* on pipping turtles, we conducted experiments on a

surrogate species (*Pseudemys nelsoni*). Over 70% of the viable hatchlings were killed by *S. invicta* during pipping or shortly after hatching.

Our next step is to conduct experiments to estimate the impact *S. invicta* is having in the field. Currently, we are monitoring gopher tortoise hatching success and juvenile survival at plots treated to kill fire ants and comparing these plots to control areas. Initial results seem to indicate increased survivorship at treated sites. Hatchlings at untreated sites are often found covered with *S. invicta*. It is possible these tortoises were killed by another predator, however, we noted no visible damage to either the shell or body parts. In the future, we hope to expand our research to other potentially vulnerable species of turtles.

Smith, Lora L. Department of Natural Sciences, University of North Florida, Jacksonville, FL 32224, USA.

The Role of the Gopher Tortoise Council in the Conservation of the Gopher Tortoise

The Gopher Tortoise Council (GTC) was formed in 1978 in response to concerns expressed by herpetologists at the Florida Museum of Natural History (then the Florida State Museum) in Gainesville, Florida. The primary objectives of the Council were to offer professional advice on management, conservation, and protection of gopher tortoises; to serve as a clearinghouse for information on gopher tortoises, and to maintain an active public information and education program. The early efforts of GTC members resulted in listing of the gopher tortoise as a species of special concern in Florida. In recent years, the Council has expanded its focus to include protection of all components of the upland habitats of the gopher tortoise.

Posters

Blihovde, W. Boyd. Department of Biology, University of Central Florida, 4000 Central Florida Boulevard, Orlando, FL 32816, USA.

Gopher Frog (*Rana capito*) Site Fidelity at Gopher Tortoise Burrows

The Florida gopher frog (*Rana capito aesopus*) is a secretive frog that commonly takes shelter in gopher tortoise burrows. Several methods are being used in this study to determine site fidelity and movements of the gopher frog in and around gopher tortoise burrows. The primary method of capture has been hand captures at night, when the frogs are most active.

There are 127 total tortoise burrows being monitored for gopher frog activity. Starting in April 1999, 12 burrows (20%) at Chuluota Wilderness Area (CWA) and 13 total burrows (19%) at Rock Springs Run State Reserve (RSRSR) have been occupied by gopher frogs. One individual at RSRSR has been observed every night for the entire five months of study. Eleven (11) frogs total have been marked using toe-clips. However, within approximately one to two months all those frogs moved from the study plots. As a result, marking each individual was halted. It is believed that the stress of being captured and marked resulted in a short migration by the frogs to other areas. Size, coloration, shape, and individual markings are currently being used to identify each frog. Three female frogs have been fitted with radio transmitters and are currently being tracked. It appears that females show stronger site fidelity than males.

HELP NEEDED!

The Gopher Tortoise Council is assembling a collection of teaching materials on gopher tortoises and upland ecosystems for placement in the state of Florida's five Regional Service Project (RSP) offices. The RSP's maintain a lending library of environmental education materials that are available free of charge to teachers. We will be donating books, videos, puppets, posters, etc. and are in need of additional funding to complete this project. If you are interested in contributing, please make checks payable to GTC and earmark them for the RSP fund. Donations should be mailed to the Gopher Tortoise Council, c/o George L. Heinrich, 1213 Alhambra Way S., St. Petersburg, FL 33705-4620. Donors will be listed in a future issue of this newsletter.

Annual Gopher Tortoise Council Meeting and ***Upland Snake Management Workshop***

20 - 22 October 2000 at the Savannah River Ecology Laboratory, Aiken, SC

Upland Snake Management Workshop Friday, 20 October

Co-sponsors: Savannah River Ecology Laboratory (SREL), Gopher Tortoise Council

Intended audience/participants: herpetologists, private and public land managers, related conservation groups



Highlights:

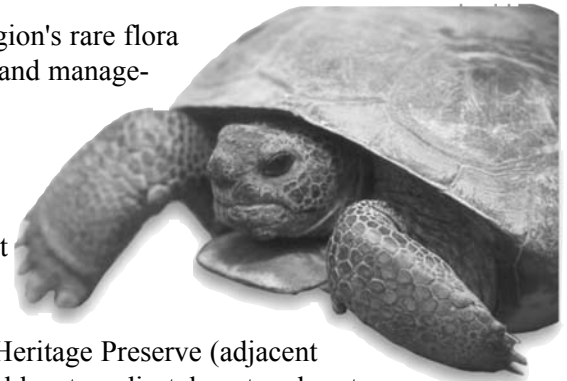
- Talks by invited speakers on natural history and conservation of xeric upland snakes, threats to their survival, and the potential impacts of common land management techniques
- Discussion/working session to produce pragmatic land management recommendations for xeric upland snakes on private and public lands
- Live animal exhibit featuring xeric upland snakes
- Educational display with posters, brochures, and fact sheets relevant to workshop

Gopher Tortoise Council Annual Meeting Saturday-Sunday, 21-22 October

Theme: Conservation Issues and Species at Risk in the Southeastern Coastal Plain

Saturday 21 October: Presentations on the current knowledge of the region's rare flora and fauna and the creative approaches being used for the conservation and management of those species.

Sunday 22 October: Potential field trips
Aiken County Gopher Tortoise Heritage Preserve, Aiken Co., SC:
Visit recently acquired state-owned property with the northeastern-most population of gopher tortoises.



Webb Wildlife Center (Hampton Co., SC) and/or Tillman Sand Ridge Heritage Preserve (adjacent Jasper Co., SC). Visit Webb Wildlife Center (operated by SCDNR) and locate radio-telemetered eastern diamondback rattlesnakes. Explore a variety of habitats on the Tillman Sand Ridge Heritage Preserve, including sand ridges with the largest protected population of tortoises in the state and small wetlands with rare plants.

Savannah River Site (Aiken and Barnwell counties, SC): Tour the SREL research and education facilities and visit selected field sites where long-term herpetofaunal research has been conducted.

Other highlights:

- Evening social on 20 October, with food, beverages, and live music
- Silent auction (proceeds to benefit a PARC educational project)

Registration information, including a detailed itinerary, will be available in the fall issue (scheduled for August mailing) of *The Tortoise Burrow*. For more information, contact Tracey Tuberville (tuberville@srel.edu / phone: 803-725-5988).

The Third Longleaf Alliance Regional Conference

Restoration and Management of Longleaf Pine Ecosystems: Silvicultural, Ecological, Social, Political and Economic Challenges

October 16-18, 2000

Holiday Inn Centre & Riverfront Center, Alexandria, Louisiana

WHAT IS THE LONGLEAF ALLIANCE? The Longleaf Alliance is a partnership of private landowners, forest industries, state and federal agencies, conservation groups, university researchers and outreach personnel and others interested in promoting a region-wide recovery of longleaf pine forests for their ecological and economic benefits. The Longleaf Alliance serves as a clearinghouse for a broad range of information on the regeneration, restoration and management of longleaf pine. A major focus is providing economically viable and voluntary options for recovery of longleaf on private lands, where most of the losses are occurring.

Through the Alliance, landowners and managers are connected regionally with peers or other public and private organizations who have successfully addressed similar problems or with researchers with similar interests and questions. The Alliance helps facilitate communication among research institutions and between researchers and managers, and builds networks between landowners, managers, consultants, industries, researchers, and longleaf proponents.

WHAT WILL THIS CONFERENCE EMPHASIZE?

The general sessions and tour will focus on needs, successes, and opportunities in longleaf pine management for the private and public sectors. The poster sessions and associated socials will be open to a wide range of topics and will be used to foster partnerships between individuals and organizations in the public and private sectors. Emphasis will be placed on addressing silvicultural, ecological, social/political and economic issues challenging landowners and resource managers interested in the management and restoration of longleaf pine.

WHO SHOULD ATTEND?

This meeting is open to individuals and organizations with interest in longleaf pine and associated plant and animal communities: including private landowners, managers, consultants, conservation groups, university researchers and outreach personnel, forest industry, and agency personnel.

REGISTRATION for this conference is \$250 for Longleaf Alliance members, \$275 for institutional members and \$300 for non-members. The registration fee includes conference materials, breaks, 2 continental breakfast, 2 lunches, 1 dinner, 2 socials, and transportation to the field trip. Fees will be discounted by \$25 if paid by September 1, 2000. Non-members will receive a one-year complimentary Longleaf

Alliance membership. Spouses may fully participate for a fee of \$100. Students may also register for a special fee of \$100.

Registration and general and poster sessions will be held at the Alexandria Riverfront Center and is connected via indoor walkways to the Holiday Inn and Radisson Hotel Bentley. The conference headquarter hotel, the Holiday Inn - Convention Centre (318-442-9000) located at 701 4th Street will host the concurrent sessions. A block of rooms has been reserved at the Holiday Inn for the following group rate: \$65 plus tax - Single or Double. In addition, the historic Radisson Hotel Bentley (318-442-1105) has a block of rooms reserved at the following group rate: \$55 single; \$65 double plus tax. Reservations should be made by September 24 to ensure availability at the conference rate. Mention you are coming to the Longleaf Alliance Conference to receive the group rate.

FIELD TRIP TO KISATCHIE NATIONAL FOREST

The tour will highlight long-term longleaf restoration efforts and will include viewing demonstrations showing various harvesting techniques, prescribed fire, even and uneven aged management and ground cover recovery.

For more information about the conference, contact:

Sue Grace, Conference Coordinator
National Wetlands Research Center
Biological Resources Division, USGA
700 Cajundome Blvd.
Lafayette, LA 70506
(337) 266-8618, Fax (337) 266-8592
Sue_Grace@usgs.gov

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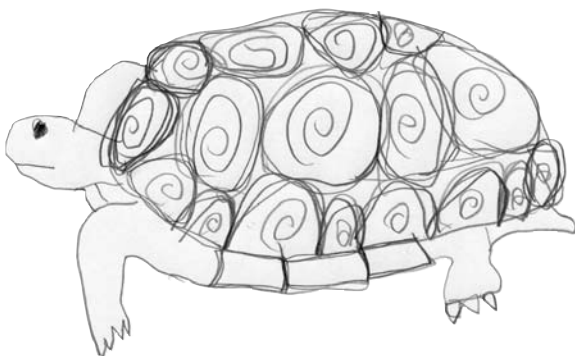
Protecting the environment is just a donation away!

Essay

RICK SCHAFFER

Rick is the 7-year-old son of GTC Treasurer Chuck Schaffer. A budding herpetologist who enjoys writing stories and drawing, Rick recently announced that when he grows up he would like to be a turtle scientist, Nintendo tester and Pokemon breeder.

Gopher tortoises are chelonians. Chelonians are turtles, tortoises and terrapins. They are reptiles and are cold blooded. Tortoises stay on land and mostly don't go in water. The babies are little and the mommies and daddies are a tiny bit smaller than the wheel on my bike. They live in Florida and southeastern USA. Their home is underground in a burrow. Gopher tortoises share their home with snakes and frogs and other animals. They eat plants. Their shell is brownish with a light brown body and black eyes. You need a special permit to keep them as a pet. It's OK for them to live in your yard if they are not in a cage. I like to watch them walk across my yard. When I walk up to them, they try to run away. When I get close to them, they get scared and hide in their shell. They are endangered and don't hurt anybody but people make them endangered by destroying their homes. People used to eat them too. I like them.



Gopherus polyphemus

Drawing by Rick Schaffer

Directory of Gopher Tortoise Council Officers, Committee Chairs, and State Representatives

Co-chairs

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Tracey Tuberville: (803) 725-5988, tuberville@srel.edu

Secretary

Jeannine Ott: (912)734-4706 ext. 267, jeannine.ott@jonesctr.org

Treasurer

Chuck Schaffer: (904) 220-0678, chelonian1@aol.com

Membership Secretary

Lora Smith: (352) 475-5953, lora_smith@usgs.gov

Merchandise/Publication Sales

Eric Sutton: (941) 330-0082, esutton@co.sarasota.fl.us

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Nominating Committee

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Environmental Fund of Florida

Liz Barker: (407) 849-1765, lbarker@intersrv.com

Public Information & Education

Laura Wewerka: (941) 275-3435, lauraw@mindspring.com

Rattlesnake Conservation Committee (Co-chairs)

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Bruce Means: (850) 681-6208, dbm5647@garnet.acns.fsu.edu

Research Advisory Committee

Bob Herrington: (912) 931-2331, bherring@canes.gsw.edu

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Mississippi

Deborah Epperson: (601) 558-2931, DE7562@aol.com

South Carolina

Tracey Tuberville: (803) 725-5988, tuberville@srel.edu

Rattlesnake Conservation Committee Update

KARL STUDENROTH

The Rattlesnake Conservation Committee (RCC) continues to grow and produce results steadily over the past several months. I am very pleased with this momentum and growth and hope we can continue our efforts until the conservation, educational and research status of the eastern diamondback rattlesnake (EDR) is greatly increased. The RCC has now grown to 35 members. Such a large committee is needed because the struggle to better understand, protect and preserve the EDR is a monumental task that lies ahead of us. I would like to welcome the following new members: Bob Brechtel, Jerry Gingerich, Julian Teodoro, Sean Wallace and H.B. Whidden.

Many of our RCC members have been active with continued and new projects. Bruce Means continues to work towards updating our EDR brochure. Mark Bailey continues to work towards producing a new EDR educational poster. Lisa Munsch has taken on the task of producing a list of organizations and individuals that present educational and conservation programs on the EDR (and venomous snakes in the Southeast. Brian Mealy has taken on the task of producing a complete and updated EDR bibliography. Martha Canady is producing a list and brief summary of the outcome of all rattlesnakes collected at all rattlesnake roundups across the range of the EDR. Laura Wewerka has taken on the task of producing an RCC/EDR tee-shirt for the GTC. Chris Harper (president of the

Southeastern Hot Herp Society) and SHHS members will be aiding the RCC with a number of projects. John Jensen and other Georgia DNR biologists met with Claxton rattlesnake roundup officials and continue to negotiate with them concerning activities at that roundup. Lastly, I presented an RCC update at the recent GTC business meeting in Bainbridge, Georgia.

On Saturday, January 29th, following the GTC business meeting, many GTC officers and members and RCC members attended the Whigham rattlesnake roundup. At this point, the main objective within the RCC is to strive to produce changes that benefit the EDR at all rattlesnake roundups in Georgia and Alabama. See John's article below on the Fitzgerald roundup.

The GTC is planning to hold a workshop on upland snake species at the upcoming annual GTC meeting being held at the Savannah River Plant in South Carolina. GTC co-chair Tracey Tuberville, myself, and other individuals are in the process of planning this event. This is an event that I would like the RCC to fully support and assist in. I will soon contact RCC members concerning this.

I would like to thank all our RCC members for volunteering for various projects and all their hard work. Together we can produce a change in the minds, hearts and activities of individuals concerning the fascinating and enigmatic eastern diamondback rattlesnake.

Fitzgerald Rattlesnake Roundup to Change Emphasis

JOHN JENSEN

The Georgia Department of Natural Resources (DNR) was recently successful in persuading the Fitzgerald Jaycees to convert their event into one in which no rattlesnakes are collected from the wild or killed. The DNR is also actively involved in discussions with the Whigham Community Club regarding alternatives to collecting large numbers of snakes from the wild. Thanks to the Fitzgerald Jaycees for taking this proactive and voluntary action!

Jensen Steps Down as Co-editor, Havoc Ensues

MARK BAILEY

Former co-editor John Jensen, who so ably kept the Tortoise Burrow informative, timely, and more or less on schedule, has had to reduce his active participation with this newsletter (but not his involvement with GTC!) so he can better focus on his duties with PARC, GA Herp Atlas, DNR, etc. Thanks, John, for helping set a standard of quality for The Tortoise Burrow that will be a challenge for me and future editors to maintain.

Editor's note: Because of computer troubles in March and the less-than-timely nature of this spring-summer combined issue, the fall Tortoise Burrow will be sent out by mid-August to accommodate late summer/early fall announcements and news. The target mailing date is August 4, so please send articles, artwork, announcements, photos, etc. in whatever format you have to Mark Bailey (email mbailey@anhinga.com or regular mail 2040 Old Federal Rd., Shorter, AL 36075) by July 21 and we'll get back on schedule. Remember, this is your newsletter and your submissions are needed!

USFWS Proposes Listing Mississippi Gopher Frog Population as Endangered

In an announcement published in the May 23 Federal Register, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service proposed to list the Mississippi gopher frog distinct population segment of the dusky gopher frog (*Rana capito sevosa*) as an endangered species. Historically, the Mississippi gopher frog is believed to have occurred in at least nine counties or parishes across Louisiana, Mississippi, and Alabama, ranging from east of the Mississippi River in Louisiana to the Mobile River delta in Alabama. Today, it is known from only one site in Harrison County, Mississippi. According to USFWS, "this last surviving population is threatened by habitat destruction and degradation from a proposed housing development on property within 200 meters of its only known remaining breeding pond; the construction and expansion of two highways in the vicinity of the pond; and a proposed reservoir. These actions pose threats to the terrestrial habitat of adult frogs and their ability to offset mortality rates with reproduction and recruitment. This proposed rule, if made final, would extend the Act's protection to the Mississippi gopher frog distinct population segment."

Public comments are solicited. The USFWS especially requests comments or suggestions concerning:

- 1) Biological, commercial trade, or other relevant data concerning any threat (or lack thereof) to this distinct population segment;
- 2) The location of any additional populations of this distinct population segment;
- 3) The reasons why any habitat should or should not be determined to be critical habitat as provided by section 4 of the Act;
- 4) Additional information concerning the range, distribution, and size of this distinct population segment; and
- 5) Current or planned activities in the subject area and their possible impacts on this distinct population segment.

The full text of the proposed rule can be found online at www.gpo.ucop.edu/search/fedfld.html. Use "*Rana capito*" as a search phrase and follow the May 23 link.

Comments should reach USFWS on or before July 24, 2000. Comments received after that date will not be considered in making a decision on the proposed rule. Send comments and materials concerning this proposal to the Field Supervisor, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Mississippi Field Office, 6578 Dogwood View Parkway, Jackson, Mississippi 39213.

International Roundtable to Develop A Protocol on Chelonian Relocation and Heritage Collections, September 26-28 in Orlando, Florida Special Workshops and Field Trips on September 25 & 29

This working meeting will bring together freshwater turtle and tortoise experts, veterinary and chelonian researchers, managers, educators, breeders, students, regulatory and conservation agencies, and enthusiasts from around the world. A published protocol will address seven important areas: ethics, disease issues, genetic and systematic issues, environmental issues, socioeconomic considerations, intra-specific impacts, and heritage collection.

This Roundtable has been convened by the Overall Meeting Co-Chairs, Ray E. Ashton and Dr. Ghislaine Guyot, to produce a practical document that puts forth a Protocol for Chelonian Relocation and Heritage Collections based on the most up-to-date information and research. Each of the seven major areas being addressed will be co-chaired by world experts. Some of the featured experts include: Dr. Gerald Kuchling (University of

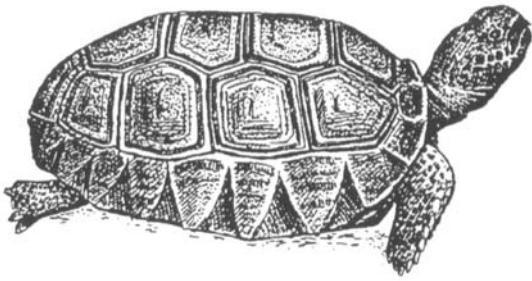
Western Australia), Dr. Elliot Jacobson (University of Florida), Dr. Pritpal Singh Soorae (IUCN/SSC Re-Introduction Specialist Group in Kenya), and Dr. Peter Pritchard (Chelonian Research Institute).

Time will be allotted to presentation of pertinent papers and a poster session to provide the Roundtable participants with additional information for discussion and final creation of the Protocol.

Send abstracts of 100 words or less for paper or poster session to Pat Ashton at PSASHTON@aol.com.

For registration information contact Ray Ashton or Ghislaine Guyot of the Ashton Biodiversity Research & Preservation Institute at: 5745 SW 75th Street #331, Gainesville, FL 32608.
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Boyd Hill Nature Park's 2000 Florida Turtle Workshops



This combined Spring-Summer issue is a result of unavoidable technical problems encountered during the preparation of the Spring issue. Every effort will be made to produce future issues in a timely manner and on a quarterly basis.

Editor

“The Natural History and Conservation of Florida Turtles,” a four-day workshop, introduces teachers, environmental educators, and conservationists to the diversity, natural history, status, conservation, and management of Florida turtles. Participants learn basic identification, causes of decline, and conservation measures, as well as activities and resources for use in the classroom. Highlights include field trips to upland, riverine, and coastal habitats where participants have an opportunity to study several species in the wild. The workshops (limited to 10 each) receive statewide inter-agency and organizational support and have been approved for component points toward teacher recertification.

2000 workshops are scheduled for Boyd Hill Nature Park, St. Petersburg, FL (13 - 16 June) and Apalachicola National Estuarine Research Reserve, Apalachicola, FL (27 - 30 June). For information on the workshops, please contact George L. Heinrich, Boyd Hill Nature Park, 1101 Country Club Way S., St. Petersburg, FL 33705 (727) 893-7328 e-mail: highpine@gte.net.

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