



The TORTOISE BURROW

Newsletter of the
Gopher Tortoise Council

www.gophertortoiseCouncil.org

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ALABAMA FLORIDA GEORGIA LOUISIANA MISSISSIPPI SOUTH CAROLINA



State Reports from the Annual Meeting

The following reports were delivered by the Gopher Tortoise Council state representatives following the annual meeting last October at Jekyll Island, Georgia.

Alabama - Roger Birkhead

I would like to start by thanking Ed Wester for his dedication to the gopher tortoise. I hope I can adequately fill his shoes as State Representative for Alabama.

Mobile County continues to experience rapid urban development. The gopher tortoise conservation bank, established in cooperation with the Mobile Area Water and Sewer System, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and Environmental Defense, currently contains 105 tortoises. Ninety-one of those were relocated since the creation of the conservation bank. The bank should eventually hold about 330 tortoises. There has been active burning and herbicide hardwood removal to improve habitat. Successful nesting has been observed.

The Alabama Department of Transportation (ALDOT) has set up a similar conservation bank on a 600-acre tract in northern Mobile County and about 20 tortoises from the Shillinger Road extension have already been relocated. South Alabama Utilities is also considering purchasing an adjacent 300+ acres for conservation banking. Future banks in Washington and Choctaw counties are being considered by ALDOT to mitigate for a proposed highway from Mobile to Florence. At all mitigation sites other species of conservation concern may be accommodated if needed.

University research included continuation of tortoise work on Conecuh National Forest, and the Solon Dixon Center by the Guyer lab at Auburn University. Current research on these and other populations across the southeast focuses on movement patterns and home range analysis, growth, population dynamics, social interactions, reproductive ecology, foraging ecology, tortoise influence on microhabitat and vegetation structure, habitat manage-

ment, and population genetics. In addition, long term monitoring of herp populations as part of the National Fire and Fire Surrogates study is being continued at the Solon Dixon Center.

I have received a few phone calls and e-mails from Baldwin County where there is continued concern over the rate of development and habitat loss. Since this is outside the Federally protected range there is little regulation. Direct impacts of Hurricane Ivan on the local tortoise populations are unknown but it will certainly influence future development and construction in the area.

Finally, Auburn University has entered into an agreement with the Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources to develop a new resort hotel and conference center at Gulf State Park in Gulf Shores. Ostensibly this will be used as an educational venue for college students in areas of study such as hotel and hospitality management, forestry, wildlife sciences, marine biology and other related disciplines. It is unknown whether any tortoise habitats will be affected by this proposed development.

Florida - Joan Berish

In September 2003, Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) staff received internal agency approval to initiate a gopher tortoise issue team. The team's mission was to create a comprehensive list of issues pertaining to gopher tortoise management, permitting, and relocation. Those issues would then be prioritized, and specific tasks to address each issue would be recommended. Team members were chosen for their expertise and experience related to tortoise management or mitigation. Twenty-one FWC staff members, including non-game biologists, land managers, attorneys, law enforcement officers, permit reviewers, and administrators, presently make up the issue team. The team first met in January 2004, then again in February, April, June, and

October. Of the more than 30 issues listed, those needs that were deemed high-priority included: providing conservation value to permitted relocations; removing current ambiguity from rules related to taking of tortoises; developing a management plan; coordinating with local governments regarding tortoise conservation; restocking tortoise-depleted public lands; managing upland habitats to benefit tortoise populations; and educating the public regarding tortoise mitigation and management. During the April meeting, the team divided the issues into 4 "buckets" that would be further addressed by specific sub-teams: Permitting, Legal/Law Enforcement, Education, and Partnerships. Examples of drafts generated by the sub-teams include a law enforcement protocol for consistent handling of tortoise/development conflicts; a clarification of "take" as it pertains to tortoises and burrows; revised options for addressing presence of tortoises on development sites; and a comprehensive public education plan. A draft management plan is also being prepared by FWC staff. Sub-teams will continue their work, with a report going to senior agency personnel in early 2005.

Georgia - Bill Birkhead

Dr. Mary Mendonca at Auburn University and two of her graduate students, Paula Kahn and Richard Beauman, have been examining the physiological responses of gopher tortoises following burrow collapse and the effects of relocation on Upper Respiratory Tract Disease (URTD) at Fort Benning for the past two years. The Army is proposing to relocate gopher tortoises at several sites to protect them from disturbance associated with intensive training and extensive construction. Dr. Mendonca determined baseline levels of corticosterone (a stress indicator hormone) prior to burrow collapse and again after tortoises self-excavated. Overall, basal corticosteroid levels were significantly positively correlated with the number of days tortoises were entombed. These animals were also immunochallenged before and after burrow collapse. Reemergence and immune responses were significantly negatively correlated with corticosterone levels. Richard documented the physical factors impacting burrows that were experimentally collapsed using forestry equipment. Collapsed zones of burrows ranged from approximately two to seven feet and, although self-excavation times ranged from hours to 85 days, the majority of tortoises emerged within 20 days. Paula is examining the physiological effects of relocation on healthy tortoises and those with URTD. All three individuals presented the initial findings at the annual meeting of the Gopher Tortoise Council.

Maggie Mitchell, a student of Dr. David Rostal at Georgia Southern University, has been studying the relationship between female gopher tortoise home range, size, reproduction, habitat characteristics, and season for the

past two years on the Fort Stewart Army Reserve in southeast Georgia. She also presented her results at the GTC meetings. Yearly reproductive output was not correlated with habitat or home range, but was inversely correlated with rainfall. Further, home range size was not correlated with female size, nor did it increase with the duration (one vs. two years) of the study. Finally, long-term recapture data provided a good representation of a tortoise's range that was determined from radio tracking.

Dr. Donna Wear continues her work with gopher tortoises that have been relocated to the McDuffie Public Fishing Area. As reported at the GTC meeting, Dr. Wear and her students determined that long-term penning (one to two years) improved site fidelity and that relocated tortoises continued to use starter burrows that had been constructed within their enclosures after enclosure barriers were removed.

Jeff Spratt and Terry Norton DVM of the Wildlife Conservation Society presented a 10-year overview of the St. Catherine's Island Gopher Tortoise Translocation Project at the GTC meeting. Although 85% of the tested population of translocated tortoises was serologically positive for *Mycoplasma agassizii* antibodies, no animals have exhibited clinical signs of URTD to date. Their results indicate that the colony is showing good site fidelity, recruitment, and health.

Dr. Norton also presented health assessment data that he and several colleagues have been collecting on free-ranging eastern indigo snakes (*Drymarchon corais*) on Fort Stewart. A few of their more noteworthy findings were that a high percentage of snakes they captured had skin lesions and that these lesions, which were only found in the winter, contained a variety of anaerobic and aerobic bacterial and fungal organisms. They also found that plasma calcium levels in these snakes were extremely elevated compared to other snake species.

Dirk Stevenson reports that the winter of 2004-05 will be the seventh consecutive year that the Fort Stewart Fish and Wildlife Branch staff has monitored the eastern indigo snake population at six discrete sandhill areas on Fort Stewart, Georgia. Thus far, 74 indigo snakes (48 males, 25 females, one sex undetermined) have been uniquely marked with PIT tags and released as part of this study. Snakes are found near gopher tortoise burrows during the late fall, winter, and early spring.

Accomplishments of this study include: (1) a number of marked snakes have been recaptured in multiple years. Many (17) have returned to the same sandhills in multiple years; (2) size data from these snakes indicate that indigos are sexually dimorphic, with males reaching 7'6" in total length and nearly 11 lbs. in weight. The largest female snake was 6'8" in total length and 7.2 lbs. in weight; (3) sexually-mature males in this population possess keels on the mid-dorsal scale rows as in Florida indigo snake popu-

lations; and (4) the capture of a juvenile this past year that was basking within one meter of a juvenile tortoise burrow. Further details regarding this study can be found in the Southeastern Naturalist 2(3): 393-408.

The Fort Stewart Fish and Wildlife Branch would like to thank Natalie Hyslop and Dr. Dave Rostal for contributing specimens to this study, to Dr. Terry Norton of the Wildlife Conservation Society for assisting with their indigo health assessment efforts, and to Karen Dyer for assisting field surveys during the first three years of this study.

Mitch Lockart and students at Valdosta State University have completed a five-year project to evaluate a gopher tortoise population at Moody Air Force Base (MAFB), Lowndes and Lanier Counties, Georgia, for URTD. Two hundred seventy-eight captures, representing 105 unique individuals, were recorded over the five-year period. Five animals were suspect, and one was positive. On a related note, one tortoise was found to contain a human pathogenic strain of Salmonella. Mitch also notes that they have initiated a genetic study of tortoises from MAFB in an attempt to determine parental lineage and to determine if the URTD positive and suspect animals are resident (of MAFB) or translocated individuals.

Mitch is anticipating a new five-year contract to continue the above studies and examine the potential effects of military activity on tortoise movements and reproductive success.

Finally, Lora Smith has provided news from the Jones Center regarding the status of fieldwork that is being conducted by four students in herpetology.

Eric Condon, a master's student in the Department of Wildlife Ecology and Conservation at the University of Florida, has completed fieldwork on the effects of fire on the home range, microhabitat use, and survivorship of box turtles (*Terrapene carolina*) in southern Georgia. Anna Liner, a master's student in the School of Forest Resources at the University of Georgia, is studying wetland predictors of amphibian species richness in seasonal wetlands. Shannon Hoss, a Ph.D. student in the Department of Biological Sciences at Auburn University, will be studying the reproductive ecology of the eastern diamondback rattlesnake (*Crotalus adamanteus*), and Amanda Subalusky, a master's student in the Department of Wildlife and Fisheries Science at Texas A & M University, will be studying the role of the American alligator in seasonal wetlands.

Mississippi - Tom Mann

OVERALL TRENDS

Negative trends cited in the most recent state reports from Mississippi continue. In the past year, much tortoise habitat was permanently lost to suburbanization, particularly in the coastal counties and in the Hattiesburg, Petal, and Poplarville areas. Habitat deterioration resulting from

insufficient burning continued as well, particularly on private lands. With the closing of its Moss Point paper mill several years ago, International Paper sold much of its extensive industrial forestry holdings in southeastern Mississippi. Although these forests were far from optimal habitat, many did support tortoises. Now many of these parcels have been bought by developers, and some have already been converted to tract housing. Habitat destruction and fragmentation accompanying Mississippi's extensive four-lane highway construction program continue; this year the corridor of concern flanks the northern extension of Hwy 63 between Leakesville and Turkey Creek.

RELOCATION ACTIVITIES

Mississippi Dept. of Transportation (MDOT)

Chuck Walters, MDOT's environmental scientist, recently captured and relocated 15 tortoises from the ROW of an extension of Highway 63 in Green County. Seven of the animals were shifted to adjoining habitat just beyond the fenced right-of-way where such parcels connected to a fairly large tortoise population on 16th Section land; eight other tortoises were transferred several miles to uplands adjoining Dead Dog Bog, a parcel bought by MDOT and deeded to the Mississippi Dept. of Wildlife, Fisheries, and Parks as mitigation for wetlands destruction. Because the Dead Dog Bog site was logged by the owner prior to its purchase by MDOT, and was not replanted or effectively burned afterward, it is badly overgrown with various *Ilex* and *Quercus* species. MDOT recently bush-hogged a portion of the uplands to ensure adequate open habitat for the tortoises already on the site and for those to be transferred to it, and will pay for necessary controlled burning of habitat at this site.

U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service

David Felder and Will McDearman, both with the Jackson, MS field office of the USFWS, have spent many field and computer hours scouring southeastern Mississippi for relatively large parcels of forested priority soil habitat which might serve as mitigation banks for tortoises if acquired by MDOT and/or other development entities. The Mississippi Department of Wildlife Fisheries and Parks (MDWFP) continues to have concerns about the relative recovery benefits of moving all animals from areas within ROWs and other development parcels to a small number of relatively large, well-managed tracts, versus simply leaving tortoises to shift for themselves on a landscape with dynamic, anthropogenic changes in vegetative cover patterns. Clearly, individual tortoises will have better odds if moved to well-managed tracts, if they remain, but local populations, even if small and dispersed, will also have diminished odds of persistence if tortoises are always moved to a small number of safe havens.

Mississippi Dept. of Wildlife, Fisheries, and Parks

Four tortoises were brought to local wildlife rehabilitation facilities on the coast. Some had relatively minor findings from collisions with traffic, all four were picked up in areas remote from tortoise habitat, and could have originated anywhere within the range of the tortoise. All were tested for URTD (sometimes two or more times, when titers were borderline), and the three found free of evidence of exposure were released by Tom Mann (MDWFP) at the Old Fort Bayou Mitigation Bank (wetlands mitigation) in Ocean Springs south of I-10, an area including priority soils where tortoises were historically present but which have been eradicated due to habitat degradation or human consumption. The tortoises were placed in individually fenced enclosures around unoccupied or starter burrows. This area is managed by the Mississippi Chapter of The Nature Conservancy. Approximately seven animals have been relocated to this site over the past five years, and at least three of these remain on site near the area of original relocation.

TORTOISE SURVEYS

Mississippi's Official Tortoise Enumerator, Ed Wester (ably assisted by his survey crew), is immersed in another comprehensive census of tortoise burrows at Camp Shelby. This involves walking relatively closely spaced transect lines through 123,000 acres, pretty much everywhere except within the Impact Zone. The survey is approximately 99% complete. Access to tortoise habitat has become more difficult since Camp Shelby was declared a Mobilization Site. Ed conducted a previous comprehensive survey of Camp Shelby in 1995, so this data will provide important information on population trends. In 2002, Ed also completed a comprehensive survey of burrows on priority soils within the DeSoto National Forest (DNF). The previous comprehensive survey on these soils was completed in 1995.

Ed is also surveying a large, well-managed, private parcel of longleaf pine habitat in Hancock County in preparation for the possible decision by the landowner to undertake a Safe Harbor agreement with the FWS.

INFORMAL CONSULTATION BETWEEN FWS AND U.S. FOREST SERVICE

Based on Ed's 1995 and 2002 tortoise surveys on the DNF, tortoise populations continue to decline, an indication of continuing habitat deterioration primarily ascribable to insufficient growing season burning. Since application of the Draft Habitat Management Chapter for tortoises has apparently been unsuccessful in arresting the decline of the tortoise and its habitat on the DNF, the USFWS recently invited the U.S. Forest Service (USFS) to enter into informal consultation regarding the impact of its forest management practices on the tortoise, and

requested that the USFS develop modifications to its practices which would permit adequate progress toward tortoise recovery. If implementation of revised practices adequate to recover tortoise populations is judged to be unrealistic in terms of budgetary, manpower, and regulatory constraints, or is in basic conflict with other USFS management objectives, the USFWS might judge status quo USFS management to have an adverse impact on tortoise recovery, and could request re-initiation of formal consultation.

In the past couple of years the DNF has conducted a much more extensive controlled burning program than was previously the case, and is aiming to burn approximately one third of its fire-maintained communities each year. However, the great preponderance of burning is conducted during the dormant season; growing season burning comprises between 10-20 percent of all burning, and can theoretically constitute no more than half of USFS burning due to a Southeast Region (from Kentucky south to Florida!) prohibition on consecutive growing season burns. Given the fact that most of the DNF is now characterized by an excess of shrub and hardwood sucker stem density, it is unlikely that this burning regime can restore good conditions or maintain them if established. Even if half the burns were conducted in the growing season, at best a site would experience a growing season burn once every six years. Given the 20 percent growing season burn goal currently in place, a site would experience such a burn every fifth burn cycle—a 15 year interval! Consider, too, that the DNF "growing season" burn program begins in mid-March and ends for the most part in May. Burns conducted in June or later, considered by some to be most effective in controlling stem density, will seldom be implemented because of fuel dryness, smoke hazard, nationwide USFS burn bans due to firefighting demands elsewhere, and/or because of manpower shortages related to the latter. The USFS needs support at all levels-- local, regional, and national-- for a shift in its burning program from one emphasizing winter burning to one based largely upon more seasonally appropriate growing season burning.

CURRENT RESEARCH

Camp Shelby Natural Heritage Program

The fieldwork for the fourth and final year of the prescribed fire study is being completed. Tentatively it appears as if a dormant season burn (2002) and a growing season burn (April 2003) were not sufficient to substantially improve habitat conditions around the firing points (i.e. while woody vegetation was initially reduced, it was not sufficient to increase herbaceous growth). This suggests that rehabilitation of many areas may require use of herbicide or mechanical means to improve habitat. A new project in collaboration with Oak Ridge National Laboratory is being developed. The pro-

positional title is "Development and Application of a Physiological Based Framework for Assessing the Biological Significance of Military Activities on Threatened and Endangered Animal Species."

The Mississippi Army Reserve National Guard and the DNF have selected 5 areas to "enhance" for gopher tortoise habitat at Camp Shelby. Areas are generally adjacent to military training areas. Activities planned starting in 2005 include herbicide application to remove hardwoods, planting longleaf if needed, and restoration of the fire regime.

FWS Relocation Parameter Experiment

Rich Seigel (Towson State), Craig Guyer (Auburn University), Will McDearman (USFWS), Abi Dinsmore, and Trisha Crabill are attempting to assess the importance of tortoise social factors and of short and long-duration enclosures to relocation success. Abi Dinsmore (assisted by Trisha Crabill in 2003) is providing most of the field labor for this enterprise, which is conducted on the DNF near a man-made pond which we someday hope to stock with tadpoles of *Rana sevosa* (Mississippi gopher frog). Twelve tortoises were relocated to replicates of 3 month enclosures and twelve were relocated to replicates of one year enclosures. Sex ratios were balanced in each enclosure. The three month enclosures were removed in August

of 2003, and since that time seven animals have dispersed a mean distance of 1420 meters (range 610-2340 meters) from the relocation site. The one year enclosures were dismantled in August of 2004; to date only two of those animals have left the relocation site.

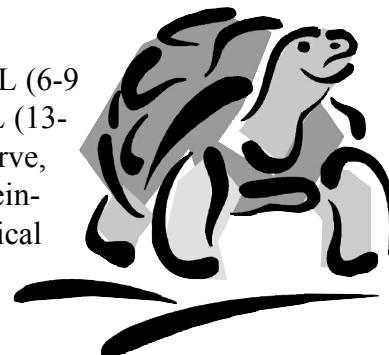
Investigation of Background Fertility Level and Hatching Success of Tortoise Eggs at Camp Shelby and on the DNF

Dr. Carl Qualls and his student, Krista Noel, are completing a multi-year study of potential reasons for the persistent low hatching success of tortoises at Camp Shelby. Hatching success of eggs carefully removed from natural nests and then incubated in the lab under different moisture and temperature regimes is compared to that of eggs left in situ. This year's hatching success in the lab and field (protected nests) was much higher than in recent years. Sixty-nine percent of lab eggs hatched ($n = 76$) and 60% of field eggs hatched ($n = 31$). Hatching success remains lower in both the field (protected nests) and in the lab than I would expect based on hatch rates observed in this species elsewhere in its range. Reproductive senescence, if manifest in this species, could explain a portion of the shortfall, but given the gap between this year's research results and the low hatch rates (<30%) observed in earlier field work at Camp Shelby, other factors are probably of greater significance.

2005 Florida Turtle Workshops for Educators

The "Natural History and Conservation of Florida Turtles," a four-day workshop, introduces formal and non-formal educators to the diversity of Florida turtles, basic identification techniques, natural history, causes of decline, and conservation measures, as well as educational activities and resources. Highlights include field trips to upland, riverine and coastal habitats where participants have an opportunity to study several species in the wild. A significant portion of each workshop involves hiking, canoeing, swimming, and snorkeling. Our goal is to provide a lifetime experience that will allow educators to return to their educational settings and excite others. The workshops (limited to twelve participants each) receive statewide interagency and organizational support and have been approved for component points toward teacher recertification.

2005 workshops are scheduled for Boyd Hill Nature Park, St. Petersburg, FL (6-9 June), Apalachicola National Estuarine Research Reserve, Apalachicola, FL (13-16 June), and Guana Tolomato Matanzas National Estuarine Research Reserve, St. Augustine, FL (20-23 June). For more information, please visit www.heinrichecologicalservices.com or contact George L. Heinrich, Heinrich Ecological Services, 1213 Alhambra Way S., St. Petersburg, FL 33705-4620 / (727) 865-6255 / highpine3@aol.com.



Gainesville Herpetological Society and the Gopher Tortoise Council Donate \$1000 to The Nature Conservancy of Mississippi

The Mississippi Chapter of The Nature Conservancy (TNC) thanks the Gainesville Herpetological Society and the GTC for their respective donations of \$835 and \$165 in February 2005. This \$1000 gift will be used by TNC toward extension of its ongoing lease of tortoise habitat on the 16th Section adjoining TNC's Willie Farrell Brown Preserve (WFBP), toward implementation of an effective controlled burning program on the 16th Section, and/or toward implementation of an effective cogon grass control program on this 16th Section.

The WFBP and adjoining 16th Section are in Hancock County, Mississippi, for all practical purposes at the very westernmost edge of the current range of the tortoise, given the dismal condition of the remnant and badly fragmented population in Louisiana. Hancock County has the fewest remaining potentially viable tortoise populations of the 13 counties constituting the heart of the historic range of the tortoise in Mississippi. The WFBP was initiated with a donation by Don Schueler of 220 acres with a life estate on 80 acres (and its modest resident tortoise population) to the TNC, which purchased an additional 70 acres to enlarge the preserve, and then added another 40 acres in 2000 with the assistance of a generous grant of \$13900 from the GTC. This preserve abuts 16th Section land to the east, on which TNC leases 181 acres (in the north-western corner of the tract) at an annual cost of \$1538, with a 5-yr option to continue the lease. Soils on most of the WFBP and 16th Section properties are well-drained Poarch soils, but there are smaller zones of Eustis soils on the 16th Section, and thereon occur the largest number of tortoises.

The heavy lifting of tortoise conservation and recovery in the zone of federal listing will clearly be done on the DeSoto National Forest (including the Camp Shelby Special Use Permit lands therein). However, tortoise conservation on 16th Section Lands, which are dedicated to generation of revenue for local school districts, offer the

best possibility for conservation of the tortoise throughout its historic range in Mississippi, since these are regularly distributed throughout this range, unlike the DeSoto National Forest, and since most are maintained in pine forest cover (managed for the school districts by the Mississippi Forestry Association). Burrow surveys conducted on suitable soils on 16th Section lands with such soils in 1995 revealed tortoise populations at 60 of the 81 sections sampled, including the 16th Section associated with the WFBP.

Tortoise populations on 16th Sections face two general threats in addition to the presence of the ubiquitous exotic fire ant: one is the inadequacy of controlled burning, virtually all of which is conducted in the dormant season, and the second is infiltration by cogon grass. Both of these problems exist at the site in question. The TNC has implemented an aggressive growing season controlled burning program on its preserves and mitigation banks in Mississippi (after reduction of fuel loads with dormant season burning, where necessary) and is likewise attempting to eradicate cogon grass. In collaboration with the Hancock County Forester, TNC will implement its management program on the leased portion of the 16th Section land adjoining the WFBP. This would have two benefits: 1) local longleaf pine habitat would have a greatly improved carrying capacity for tortoises, and 2) the Mississippi Forestry Association would have a working model for application of the twin tools of growing season burning and cogon grass eradication to its managed areas throughout southeastern Mississippi. This would have huge strategic significance to tortoise conservation in its listed range. It is probable that certain standard forest management practices may contribute to cogon grass infestations; TNC can assist the MS Forestry Commission with identification of and elimination or mitigation of such practices, as well.

Tom Mann

The Tortoise Burrow is published three times annually. Deadlines for submission of announcements and articles are the 15th of March, July, and November. Send materials to the editor: Mark Bailey, 2040 Old Federal Road, Shorter, AL 36075, telephone (334) 727-2040, fax (334) 727-1005, mbailey@conservationsoutheast.com. Decisions concerning publication of submitted material rest with the editor and co-chairs. Please send address changes to membership secretary Will Knox, P.O. Box 2265, Cross City, FL 32628, or e-mail at wknox55@bellsouth.net.

Reprint Policy

Articles or opinions that appear in *The Tortoise Burrow* may be reprinted with the permission of the editor or GTC co-chairs. The GTC reserves the right to approve editorial changes prior to reprinting and requests that reprints credit *The Tortoise Burrow, Newsletter of the Gopher Tortoise Council*.

The slide show and resource notebook have been distributed to all who requested them. If you would like a CD with the show in PowerPoint and the resource notebook in PDF, please send me your mailing address. I also have a few sets of the 35mm slides.

At the annual meeting I talked with Linda Wilson, who was working to distribute the program to every school and environmental educator in Charlotte and Sarasota counties in Florida. That idea inspired me to call on everyone at the meeting to pick a county and help GTC distribute the program to all of the schools and environmental educators. Several people signed up for a county... huge thanks for all of those that did. So far we have all of Louisiana, Mississippi and Florida covered with a potential for Georgia. I'd love to hear from some of the Alabama and South Carolina members!

What I am requesting is if you can: 1) track down the addresses of all the schools and environmental educators in your chosen county and provide them to me. 2) talk to a group that you know of and see if they would be willing to donate towards distributing the CDs in their area (it costs about 75 cents a copy to make the CD, label it and put it in a jewel case). 3-Do both!

Please contact me if you can help out or if you have any questions at laura.w@mindspring.com or 239-461-7469.

We would like to thank all of the contributors that made the original program and distribution possible:

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At the annual meeting we awarded our first Environmental Education Mini-Grant! Dr. Paula H. Chambers, Media Specialist at West Bainbridge Elementary School in Bainbridge Georgia received \$300 for "Gopher Tortoise Tuesdays." This is a wonderful program that combines guest speakers, field trips, research, essay writing, art and presentations on tortoises and upland ecosystems. The children will even be sharing their essays, art and slide presentations at a parent-teacher meeting... hopefully getting the adults as excited as the kids. I think this is a wonderful project to kick off this new grant and am already looking forward to next year's meeting to see how the program went, as well as award funding to more projects! If you would like to apply for a grant, check out our website, www.gophertortoisecouncil.org, to get more details and an application form.

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South Carolina
 Steve Bennett (see above)

Announcing the 2005 Annual GTC Meeting

October 7-9, 2005
Ravine Gardens State Park, Palatka, Florida

Mark your calendar now for the 27th annual meeting, which will begin Friday October 7 with a special session, "Approaches to Acquire and Manage Conservation Lands," followed by a social. Papers will be presented at the regular session on Saturday, with Sunday reserved for field trips. Catered banquet Saturday. Watch the website and the next newsletter for more information, and plan to join us this fall in Florida.

Join the Gopher Tortoise Council online using the secure PayPal method at www.gophertortoiseCouncil.org.

Or make your check payable to
the Gopher Tortoise Council and send to:

GOPHER TORTOISE COUNCIL
c/o Florida Museum of Natural History
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P. O. Box 117800
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Student- \$15
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Sustaining- \$75
Life- \$300 (one time payment)



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GOPHER TORTOISE COUNCIL
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