



The TORTOISE BURROW

Newsletter of the
Gopher Tortoise Council

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ALABAMA FLORIDA GEORGIA LOUISIANA MISSISSIPPI SOUTH CAROLINA



GEORGE L. HEINRICH

Notes from a Co-chair

Over two hundred people attended the Florida turtle symposium and the annual meeting of the Gopher Tortoise Council held at Eckerd College in early October. The symposium proved to be both an enjoyable event and an important conservation meeting. Final accounting is still ongoing, but it looks like we did well financially. One hundred percent of the profit is earmarked to help offset the cost of producing a book on the conservation biology of Florida turtles. Discussions are already underway for a third symposium to be held elsewhere in the state. I plan to include a full symposium report in the March issue of this newsletter.

Deborah Epperson recently completed her two years as Co-chair and deserves a big thank-you from the entire membership. This job is no piece of cake and each year it becomes increasingly difficult for Joan Berish, our Nominating Committee Chair, to find qualified individuals that are willing to serve. We are very fortunate that Tracey Tuberville has agreed to be our new Co-chair. Tracey has been serving as our South Carolina State Representative and is already at work planning the 2000 annual meeting (see announcement in this newsletter). I look forward to working with Tracey over the next year and encourage our South Carolina members to provide their support with the upcoming meeting.

After a two year stint as GTC Treasurer, Christian Newman has stepped down to work on other projects. Christian did an outstanding job of getting our finances back in order! He will be taking over as chair of the Public Information and Education Committee and we expect to see more of his good work. Many of you know that I strongly believe the work of this committee is some of the most important work we do. Alice Bard served in this position for the past two years and we thank her for her efforts. The position of GTC Treasurer will be filled by Chuck Schaffer. Chuck is a student at the University of North Florida and was a big help at the recent Florida turtle symposium. Thank-you to Tracey, Christian and Chuck for stepping forward to serve. We greatly appreciate your volunteerism and hope others will follow your fine example.

With the symposium now behind us, we can focus on several other major projects, including the Upland Habitat Protection Project, Rattlesnake Conservation Committee, and the development of both a GTC operations manual and interactive website. Folks, I hate to keep bringing it up, but these projects demand the involvement of more members. There are several volunteer opportunities available, including the following key positions. The Upland Habitat Protection Project still needs a chairman. In addition, we need coordinators for both our annual workday at the Perry Oldenburg Mitigation Park and the GTC Field Trip Program. The latter was introduced this year and was very successful. We hope to offer it again in 2000, but will only be able to do so if we have a volunteer before the end of January. I would hate to lose this program, but we have so many things to work on and so few of us doing most of the work. Please contact Joan Berish or myself to discuss these volunteer opportunities.

Please remember that this is your organization! With teamwork we can continue to strengthen our efforts toward conserving gopher tortoises and their associated upland ecosystems. However, without your volunteer support we will have little choice but to cut back. We have worked hard and achieved some important goals over the last few years. Let's not lose our momentum!

The next GTC business meeting is scheduled for 28 January 2000 (6:00 pm) at the Bainbridge College campus in Bainbridge, Georgia. GTC members are encouraged to attend and learn more about opportunities to serve your organization and its cause. Please contact me directly for more information.

In closing, I highly recommend that you read Whit Gibbon's article on Partners in Amphibian and Reptile Conservation (PARC) in this newsletter. The GTC strongly supports the efforts of PARC and is excited to be a partner in this new conservation initiative. We extend our sincere thanks to Whit and the other key players who have put this promising program into action.

George L. Heinrich

Alabama

ED WESTER

The gopher tortoise is federally protected as a threatened species in Mobile, Washington and Choctaw Counties in the extreme southwestern part of Alabama. Gophers are protected by state nongame regulations throughout the remainder of southern Alabama.

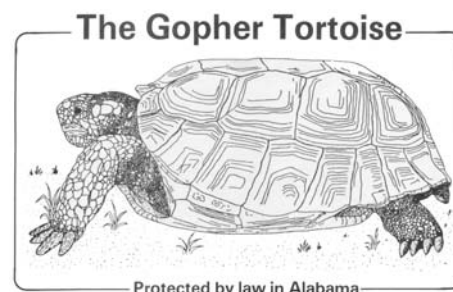
Gopher tortoise conservation efforts in Alabama have always been most intensive in the federally protected range. Within this area (particularly Mobile County) construction projects potentially impacting gopher tortoises and their habitat frequently occur. Typical projects include natural gas pipeline construction/expansion and highway construction. However, this year the "information super-highway" has reached Alabama (or is at least passing through). Several interstate fiber-optic communication installation projects have occurred, or are occurring, this year. These lines are typically constructed within existing highway rights-of-way; but in degraded habitats - this is often where gopher tortoise burrows occur. Fortunately, however, problems have been minimal and to my knowledge - no gopher tortoises have been lost.

Urban sprawl and development in rural areas are also becoming a significant problem in Mobile County where upland habitats are most commonly impacted. In the central and northern parts of the county, gopher tortoises are frequently encountered in areas slated for individual home construction and on an increasing number of multi-home developments. In response, Mobile County has stopped issuing permits for perc tests for septic tank installations on sites with nearby gopher tortoises. As such, landowners and developers are becoming increasingly upset and legal battles are sure to ensue. Unfortunately, there is no minimal federal nexus in this issue and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is somewhat limited in the action that can be taken. One proposal that is being considered is relocation of gopher tortoises from such sites to portions of a several thousand acre tract of land owned by the Mobile Board of Sewer and Water. Because this land constitutes the immediate watershed surrounding the City of Mobile drinking water supply, it is mandated to be left undeveloped. Barbara Allen of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service attended this year's meeting to discuss this issue in more detail with the Council. She will also be needing our help in the upcoming months in the form of input and review of this proposal, and perhaps others, addressing this significant problem.

Still in Mobile County, last year Williams Gas Pipeline - Transco completed construction of a new natural gas compressor station near Citronelle. Prior to construction, one gopher tortoise was relocated from the cattle pasture impacted by construction to an existing burrow a few hun-

dred feet away. To compensate for the relocation of this tortoise and for the loss of potential tortoise habitat in the pasture, Transco agreed to manage approximately 50 acres of upland habitats on company-owned lands surrounding the station for gopher tortoises. Early this year initial habitat management efforts began. Controlled burning of the site is not feasible because of safety and liability issues associated with the site and numerous nearby residences. Instead the entire area was mowed to reduce woody vegetation and efforts were made to eradicate noxious cogon grass from the site. Recent followup surveys identified several new gopher tortoise burrows on the site. Additional mowing events are planned again this winter, and likely over several more years, to bring the extensive woody underbrush on several portions of the site under control.

In other Alabama news, a study of the effects of gopher tortoise burrow collapsing by heavy equipment has been completed and is currently being written up. You may remember from past reports that this study is being conducted on a site near Auburn, Alabama with clayey soils (and in sandy soils on Apalachicola National Forest in Florida) to address the impacts of collapsed burrows during right-of-way mowing on natural gas pipelines. All 19 tortoises in the sandy soils excavated themselves from their collapsed burrows. Fourteen of 15 tortoises in clayey soils excavated themselves. The one tortoise that did not excavate itself from its collapsed burrow in clayey soils was found dead in its burrow after rainfall eroded a hole into the burrow. Given the apparent ease with which other tortoises seemed to be able to excavate themselves and that rainfall alone eroded a hole through the relatively thin burrow roof, it is possible that the death of this individual was not a direct result of its burrow being collapsed.



HANDS OFF

Possessing, taking, transporting, exporting, processing, selling, offering for sale, or shipping gopher tortoises is prohibited and is punishable by fines or imprisonment. For further information call 222-2555 (Andalusia) or contact your local U.S. Forest Service officer.

GEORGIA SOUTHERN UNIVERSITY

Dr. Dave Rostal and his students continue their work on a number of projects, including:

- 1.) the work of a graduate student who is examining the population genetics of gopher tortoises using microsatellite DNA;
- 2.) a seasonal endocrine study in which gopher tortoises from the vicinity of Statesboro and those from Cape Canaveral are being compared;
- 3.) a follow-up study on temperature-dependent sex determination in gopher tortoises (sex ratios approach 1:1 in adult tortoises, whereas those of hatchlings are often skewed in either direction);
- 4.) the work of another graduate student who is comparing the nutritional quality of vegetation potentially consumed by gopher tortoises at an unburned site (George L. Smith State Park) compared to a site at which prescribed burns occur (Fort Stewart Military Reservation);
- 5.) a continuation of a mark and recapture study of gopher tortoises on Fort Stewart;
- 6.) the continued monitoring of gopher frog reproductive trends on Fort Stewart; and
- 7.) the recent completion of a study by one of his graduate students who assessed the use of upland and lowland habitats by the herpetofauna of Fort Stewart.

AUBURN UNIVERSITY

Jeannine Ott, a student of Dr. Craig Guyer, recently defended her Master's Thesis at Auburn University. Jeannine examined patterns of burrow use, home range, and dispersal of gopher tortoises at Green Grove on the Joseph W. Jones Ecological Research Center near Bainbridge, Georgia. Jeannine is presently employed at the Jones Center where she is trying to ascertain the minimal area required to support a minimal viable population of gopher tortoises (circa 50 adult individuals). This winter she will begin marking and radiotracking gopher frogs at the Jones Center. Roger Birkhead is a Master's Degree student of Dr. Guyer's, who is being advised at the Center by Dr. Bill Michener. His project is "The diet of the Gopher Tortoise (*Gopherus polyphemus*) and its role as a seed disperser in the longleaf pine wiregrass ecosystem." He hopes to compare plant species found around tortoise burrows with those found in similar habitat without tortoises to see if differences might be attributable to seed dispersal by this species.

Finally, Dr. Guyer, along with Dr. Sharon Hermann and a former student, Hardin Waddle (who is now pursuing his Master's Degree at Florida International University), will be employing action cameras in order

to ascertain mating opportunities for female gopher tortoises at Tall Timbers Research Station in northern Leon County, Florida (just south of the Georgia State line).

GEORGIA DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES NONGAME PROGRAM

The Georgia DNR is nearing completion of a statewide conservation plan for red-cockaded woodpeckers on private land. One aspect of the plan involves mitigated incidental take of RCW groups determined to belong to small, non-viable populations. Such groups, which are disappearing from the landscape due to demographic isolation, will be replaced with new groups to form a viable population at a private land mitigation site. Juveniles from the isolated groups will be translocated over a four-year period to help form replacement groups at the recipient site. Then, prior to any habitat-altering activity, the remaining birds will be moved as well. Additionally, birds will be moved from other donor populations to help build the mitigation population to a more viable number. Another aspect of the plan is safe harbor, which allows landowners to lock in a baseline level of responsibility in exchange for beneficial habitat management. Should the RCW population on the property increase, the additional groups will be automatically eligible for translocation at no expense to the landowner. This plan should encourage landowners to manage coastal plain pine habitats in a more ecologically sensitive manner since much of the fear of having RCWs on one's property will be removed. It will benefit the overall RCW population by forming a viable support population to replace the isolated relict groups that could disappear at any time.

Another item of interest is that Georgia DNR has begun releasing "waif tortoises" that they "acquire" at the McDuffie Public Fishing Area, which is located in the eastern part of the state. McDuffie Public Fishing Area is an approximately 570-acre tract of state-owned land situated in the Fall Line sandhills. An isolated, relict longleaf pine community is situated within its interior. The site has been well surveyed for natural tortoise populations, which do not exist. Further, no suitable habitat occurs adjacent to McDuffie PFA on private land. Each year, approximately five to ten individual gopher tortoises of unknown origin and health are "acquired" by the GDNR---- primarily released tortoises found far outside of their known range. They plan to use McDuffie as a release site for these individuals, knowing that they will not likely encounter natural, healthy populations of tortoises. Currently, three tortoises have been released at the site.

Florida

JOAN E. BERISH

The gopher tortoise remains a Species of Special Concern in Florida; harvest has been prohibited since 1988. Mitigation options (to offset the effects of development on tortoise populations) remain unchanged from last year. Options include avoiding developing in areas with tortoises, avoiding individual burrows, protecting habitat, and/or relocating tortoises. Under the habitat protection option, developers may set aside an on-site preserve, purchase habitat adjacent to public lands, or contribute to a mitigation banking fund to buy habitat in a mitigation park. There are currently 7 mitigation parks.

The precursor to Florida's gopher tortoise management plan has been recently revised and updated. The tome, which will serve as the background for a detailed management plan, was initially written in the mid-1990's. A succinct, action-oriented management plan will be developed in the near future.

In 1998, 61 gopher tortoises from 4 sites (3 diseased populations and a control) were radio-instrumented to gather information on mortality rates associated with upper respiratory tract disease (URTD). Blood samples and nasal flushes were collected from radioed tortoises in 1998 and 1999 as part of this Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) ongoing study. Recapture efforts in 1999 revealed that 2 of 15 radioed tortoises at one study site had died outside their burrows; a third tortoise with signs of URTD was euthanized and necropsied. Within the last year, over 100 dead tortoises have been found at this site near Brooksville. At another study site near Jacksonville, one of 15 radioed tortoises was

found dead in its burrow. Continued monitoring will document mortality rates and changes in serology over time. Tortoises were instrumented to keep track of individuals, but much more data could be collected on home range, movements, and behavior.

I am seeking enthusiastic students, especially grad students who are in need of a thesis project, to follow these tortoises on a daily or twice weekly basis (depending on time of year). If you or one of your students is interested, please call (352-955-2230) or email Joan Berish (berishj@gfc.state.fl.us).

Other recent URTD surveys have been undertaken by Becky Smith and Rich Seigel at the Kennedy Space Center and by Cyndi Gates on the 7 FWC mitigation parks. Henry Mushinsky and Earl McCoy are planning to follow-up on their previous tortoise population surveys on selected public lands; they will also be testing for exposure to URTD.

On 14 October, FWC held the first stakeholders' meeting in Gainesville to discuss gopher tortoise conservation and mitigation, with emphasis on relocation and disease issues. Representatives from development, mining, and agricultural industries were joined by tortoise biologists and conservationists. Ray Ashton represented the Gopher Tortoise Council. The group outlined some basic conservation needs for the gopher tortoise in Florida, but much of the meeting was spent discussing upper respiratory tract disease. Additional meetings are planned for this winter.

Mississippi

DEBORAH EPPERSON

In Mississippi, the gopher tortoise is considered a threatened species by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and an endangered species by the state. While this affords the tortoise federal protection, threats to its existence continue.

The destruction and fragmentation of gopher tortoise habitat by numerous new road projects in the state is an issue of concern. New roads through the DeSoto National Forest will destroy and fragment available tortoise habitat. Direct impacts of road construction include loss of habitat and increased road mortality. The indirect effects are more difficult to evaluate but include increased opportunities for invasive exotics

(imported fire ants and cogon grass) and potential conflicts with forest management practices (use of prescribed fire).

In the 25 September Federal Register, the United States Fish and Wildlife Service published a candidate species list. The black pine snake (*Pituophis melanoleucus lodingi*) and the Mississippi gopher frog (*Rana capito sevosa*) are now considered candidate species. Research efforts will continue on these species in addition to gopher tortoise research at Camp Shelby Training Site and Marion County Wildlife Management Area in southern Mississippi.

Louisiana

STEVE SHIVELY

The Audubon Zoo no longer wishes to hold gopher tortoises (although the public surely still dumps tortoises on them), so the plan regarding waif tortoises has changed somewhat. Previously, the zoo would temporarily hold tortoises, and then we would eventually have them tested for URTD. We released the uninfected tortoises at Sandy Hollow WMA. Now, we have to deal with each tortoise as it comes in. What we usually do now is take the animal to the LSU Vet School for them to draw blood, send the sample to Florida for testing,

and temporarily hold the tortoise. We no longer have the luxury of having a facility that can act as a safety valve by holding numbers of tortoises.

The Nature Conservancy in Louisiana has acquired a preserve and management rights to adjacent land in St. Tammany Parish that has resident gopher tortoises. This preserve joins Sandy Hollow WMA and Bogue Chitto National Wildlife Refuge as another "public" site in Louisiana protected and managed to the benefit of tortoises.

South Carolina

TRACEY TUBERVILLE

Gopher tortoises occur on two state Heritage preserves in South Carolina. Tillman Sand Ridge Heritage Preserve (Jasper Co.) harbors the largest gopher tortoise population in the state, and the northern-most population of tortoises occurs on the Aiken County Gopher Tortoise Preserve (ACGTP). Earlier this year, more than 500 acres of adjacent private land were added to the ACGTP, bringing the total preserve area to 1395 acres.

Management and restoration efforts on the preserve include prescribed fires and replanting of longleaf pine. However, only 19 burrows were found during a 1999 survey, and only 4-5 burrows appeared to be intact. South Carolina Department of Natural Resources (SCDNR) is considering the possibility of some sort of intervention effort, such as trapping isolated tortoises from local private land-holdings and releasing them on the preserve. The SCDNR plan to contact the Gopher Tortoise Council to seek advice and approval of the GTC before they proceed with any action.

Tracey Tuberville has been conducting a radio-telemetry study of eastern and southern hognose snakes on the Savannah River Site since October 1998. The project is funded in part by the Gopher Tortoise Council and full results will be presented at the 2000 annual meeting. Steve Bennett and Wade Kalinowsky of SCDNR and Michael Dorcas of Davidson College have been conducting a mark-recapture and radio-telemetry study of diamondback rattlesnakes. A description of the study appeared in the June 1998 issue of the GTC newsletter and an update has been provided to the Rattlesnake Conservation Committee.

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OPEN POSITION

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What is PARC and Why Should You Care?

WHIT GIBBONS

Partners in Amphibian and Reptile Conservation (PARC) is a recently developed initiative designed to address conservation of reptiles and amphibians. PARC is poised to find the solutions to the problems faced by herpetofauna. People who have an agenda that in some way involves snakes, frogs, turtles, salamanders, lizards, or crocodilians should find out about PARC.

The PARC Mission Statement puts it succinctly:

To conserve amphibians, reptiles and their habitats as integral parts of our ecosystem and culture through proactive and coordinated public/private partnerships.

These beleaguered animals and their habitats may at last have people on their side, in North America and perhaps the whole world. Reptiles and amphibians have been steadily disappearing from much of the United States during the past few decades. Everyone is familiar with the amphibian problems, but the reptile plight is every bit as severe. One example is the southern hognose snake, a small harmless species that once lived from Mississippi to North Carolina. No specimens have been seen in Alabama or Mississippi for more than 18 years. Another is the eastern indigo snake, the last sighting of a native specimen being reported from Alabama more than 40 years ago. And, of course, an amphibian, the flatwoods salamander of the Southeast, is the most recent species to be added to the federal list of threatened species. And the list goes on and on, from California to Maine to Florida.

PARC could be the answer to helping maintain the herpetofaunal component of our country's natural heritage and recovering some of what we have almost lost. PARC's organizational meeting in Atlanta in early June was the first national gathering. Based on attendance, PARC is the most diverse group of individuals and organizations that have ever worked together to address the problems confronting reptiles and amphibians on a national and global scale.

Diversity has become a symbol of strength, health, and well-being in biological communities, and so it is with societies and organizations. The more than 200 individuals who attended the organizational meeting represented 170 organizations. Included among the participants were representatives of museums, nature centers, state wildlife departments, universities, federal agencies, conservation societies, research laboratories, forest products industry, the pet trade, and environmental consultants and contractors. The attendance included participants from 33 states, Canada (British Columbia), Mexico (Mexico City), and the District of Columbia. Many of the

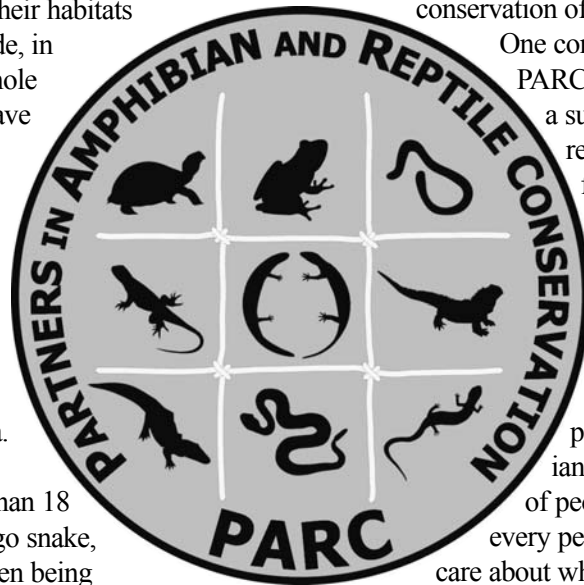
groups are unaccustomed to working together, but the time has come to put aside differences of opinion and to hear all sides. No one has an interest in eliminating more herpetofauna, but solutions for the conservation of wild populations vary among government agencies, conservation groups, and private industry. All sides must be listened to and all must be allowed to participate, because all can contribute to solving the problems. The diverse mix of people and organizations will not only be able to identify the problems confronting native herpetofauna but will also be able to implement solutions and provide the support needed to assure the effective conservation of native herpetofauna.

One consensus among the participants at the PARC meeting is that a key goal in developing a sustainable approach for conservation of reptiles and amphibians should be to familiarize the public with the organisms and their habitats so that everyone develops an appreciation for herpetofauna. Public support of such an effort, with any group of fauna or flora, is a vital ingredient for a long-term solution.

Some people have asked, Why should people care about reptiles and amphibians? My first response is, ask the millions of people in the country who do care. For every person you can find who says he does not care about what happens to turtles, frogs, or salamanders, I can find ten or more who do care. Most people have just never been asked. In fact, a majority of U.S. citizens would be supportive of a nationwide conservation effort, not just for reptiles and amphibians, but for all wildlife.

Herpetofauna represent a major part of our natural heritage. If these animals are in trouble, we are in trouble. Reptiles and amphibians are sentinels of our environmental health. If they are declining and ultimately disappearing, we need to make amends. What happens to herpetofauna is a sign of what could happen to other wildlife and maybe even to us.

PARC is not looking for scapegoats but instead is looking for partnerships with people who want to do the right thing, who want to set the score right in the nation's conservation efforts towards herpetofauna, towards all reptiles and amphibians. My impression is that the PARC concept will be highly successful and lead this country and others onto the path of conservation of native wildlife. PARC has a vision of providing the remedies necessary to correct the environmental problems that confront this group of animals and their habitats. It may be the last chance we will have for us to assure that humans and herpetofauna can live harmoniously in today's world. Let us know if you want to participate (parc@srel.edu) or check the PARC Web site (www.parcplace.org).



Since the last GTC newsletter, the RCC and some of its members have been very active and productive. Our RCC meeting at the recent annual GTC meeting & 2nd Florida Turtle Symposium was very successful. I'd like to welcome the new RCC members, and former RCC members that renewed their status at the recent meeting. We now have 28 RCC members! I'm impressed with the response we've had with the RCC and hope we can follow through with a number of the ideas and projects we discussed at the recent meeting. As I mentioned at the meeting, let's try to help each other as much as possible with our various RCC projects. Please feel free to contact and coordinate through me, as a central contact point, for any EDR research, conservation or educational projects.

A number of issues were discussed and new projects were begun at the recent RCC meeting. The following is a summary of the five major issues discussed at the RCC meeting: 1) We are currently running low on the number of remaining GTC-RCC Eastern Diamondback Rattlesnake brochures. Bruce Means agreed to review our old brochure and produce a new EDR brochure as soon as possible. If anyone has any comments on the old EDR brochure or suggestions for the new updated brochure, please contact Bruce Means or myself. 2) Mark Bailey also agreed to produce a new EDR educational poster for the RCC. If anyone has any comments on the old EDR poster, suggestions, or would like to assist with the new updated poster, please contact Mark Bailey or myself. 3) John Jensen (as the GA DNR herpetologist), discussed the possibility of GTC and the GADNR endorsing rattlesnake friendly festivals in Georgia and participating in them. John met with Claxton roundup representatives on Oct. 29th to discuss these issues. John has reported that the meeting went well, and that they hope to work something out, but nothing has been decided yet. John hopes to meet with Whigham and Fitzgerald roundup representatives in the future. How we further deal with the issue of rattlesnake roundups in GA and AL, within RCC, will be determined by the outcome of John's efforts and the reaction of the GA roundup organizers to the GADNR's proposal. 4) Several years ago the Florida Natural Areas Inventory listed the EDR on their special vertebrates list and began tracking their occurrence within Florida.

To better assess EDR past and present abundance, status, and population trends, it is vital that all states within the EDR's range begin a tracking and monitoring program for the declining EDR! 5) We also discussed the controversial issue of what people should do and how they should react with random encounters with EDRs in their yards and neighborhoods and EDR relocations in such cases. Nothing was really decided as far as how or what RCC

should do regarding such encounters. If any RCC member would like to organize and lead a further investigation into this important and controversial issue, please contact me.

I also believe there is a need for someone to develop an active list of people within the range of the EDR that present rattlesnake educational and conservation programs. Education is one of our most important tools in our efforts to protect and preserve EDRs. Such a list could be developed and used by the RCC to increase the efforts of individuals that are already giving such programs; and to increase the coverage, regions, organizations or schools that such EDR educational programs could be presented to. If anyone would like to organize and lead such an effort, please contact me.

Before the last RCC meeting, I developed an RCC membership form and data sheet. This form is an important first step in organizing and maximizing any RCC efforts. I would like to thank those RCC members that have returned this form to me. Will those of you that have not returned this form to me, please do so as soon as possible? I will soon mail this form to those RCC members that were not present at the recent meeting.

Just a note to remind everyone that in order to be an RCC member, you first must be a member of the GTC. If you are not a GTC member, you may contact the GTC secretary or membership secretary to get membership information.

Since the last RCC update, I would like to welcome the following new or returning RCC members: Mark Bailey, Mary Barnwell, Joan Berish, David Cook, Bruce Dangerfield, Kevin Enge, Deborah Epperson, John Jensen, Brian Mealy, Meg O'Connell, Greta Parks & Pat Rider. I also still need email addresses for the following RCC members: Roger Birkhead, Sally Braem, Martha Canady, Bruce Dangerfield & William Knox. Additionally, those former RCC members listed in the last RCC update that do not wish to retain active membership will be removed from RCC membership status unless I am otherwise contacted. Also, please note my correct contact information under the GTC officers section of this newsletter.

If anyone has any EDR related news or research items, please email them or contact me and I will include them in the next RCC update or at least point you in the right direction. Let's keep up the good work we are doing on behalf of the EDR and keep this momentum going within RCC! Remember, we're working together to better understand, protect and preserve the EDR, which is one of the most unique and incredible snake and wildlife species on earth! Better protection and understanding of EDRs also leads to better protection and understanding of gopher tortoises, and their associated upland species and ecosystems.

Black Pine Snake, Mississippi Gopher Frog Federal Candidates for Listing

The black pine snake (*Pituophis melanoleucus lodingi*) and the Mississippi gopher frog (*Rana capito sevosa* = *R. sevosa*) were identified as candidate species in the October 25 "Review of Plant and Animal Taxa That Are Candidates or Proposed for Listing as Endangered or Threatened" (Federal Register 64, No. 205).

The black pine snake occurs in southwest Alabama, southern Mississippi, and southeastern Louisiana. The "Mississippi" gopher frog is the western population of *Rana capito*, which unpublished data suggest merits full species status. This population is known only from a single pond on the DeSoto National Forest in Mississippi, but there are historic records of gopher frogs, presumably of the same taxon, from Alabama to Louisiana.



Gopher frog

Year 2000 Meeting Announcement

The next Gopher Tortoise Council annual meeting will convene in South Carolina for the first time ever. The meeting will be held at the Savannah River Ecology Lab (Aiken, South Carolina) on 20-22 October 2000. Details will follow in the spring Tortoise Burrow.

Renewal Reminder

It is time to renew your Gopher Tortoise Council membership! Please complete and send in the enclosed form.

The GTC is a nonprofit and tax-exempt organization under ITS Code Section 501(c)(3). ID #59-2010727

GOPHER TORTOISE COUNCIL
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