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Boy holding a corn snake at the Florida Scrub Jay Festival hosted by the Merritt Island National Wildlife Refuge. Read more about this and other GTC educational activities on pages 2-3.

**Message From the Co-Chair****Ron Concoby**

First, I would like to say what a great honor it is to have been elected Co-Chair of the Gopher Tortoise Council (GTC). I step into a role that requires much dedication, as there were many before me that had great successes as Co-Chair. My hat is off to those folks, especially to Christian Newman, our outgoing Co-Chair. Hats off as well to David Steen for his great job organizing the 32<sup>nd</sup> Annual Gopher Tortoise Council Meeting in Alabama. The meeting was a great success, as well as one of great honor for our late friend and longtime gopher tortoise conservationist, Mr. Ray Ashton. You will be missed by all, Ray!!! Once again, we would like to say "thank you" to David and all those who supported his efforts. I would also like to welcome the incoming Secretary, Connie Henderson, the new South Carolina State Representative, Eric Fann, and the new Co-Chair of the Upland Snake Conservation Committee, Kimberly Andrews. Thanks to all of you for taking on these responsibilities!

Moving on to news about tortoises that should be of interest to all GTC members. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) has received a petition to list the eastern populations of the gopher tortoise as federally threatened, which for many of us did not come as a surprise. Not too long afterwards, the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) filed a Resolution, which stated "FWC does not believe that federal listing would add any conservation value for gopher tortoise (see press release on Pg. 4 of this newsletter)." Stay tuned folks; this is worth following as the process moves forward. Some feel that the FWC Gopher Tortoise Management Plan will not provide adequate protection for gopher tortoises and commensal species to prevent further decline of these species in Florida. The debate is mostly in regards to a lack of adequate funding to prevent loss of habitat and whether funding will be more adequate with federal protection vs. state protection. It will be interesting to see the outcome of the federal filing.

Also from Florida, the Gopher Tortoise Technical Assistance Group (GTTAG) continues to meet with FWC staff in an effort to provide recommendations that encourage and promote ethical relocation practices, ecologically-based protection measures, and equitable guidelines for all who encounter tortoises and commensal species, as FWC staff moves forward with fine tuning the Gopher Tortoise Permitting Guidelines. This year looks to be a very exciting and challenging year for tortoises and commensal species. Currently, a task force has been commissioned by GTTAG to come up with recommendations for relocation of tortoises and commensal species to public lands. This is quite controversial; key issues include concern about the lack of management and/or protection in perpetuity on public lands and competition with private Gopher Tortoise Recipient Sites. Furthermore, GTTAG has commissioned another task force to make recommendations for a set of Best Management Practices for the relocation of commensal species, including the Florida gopher frog and Florida mouse, two species which I continually defend! Another burrow commensal, the eastern indigo snake has its own share of controversy. I encourage GTC members to actively seek ways to support our mission to protect tortoises, their habitat and commensal species.

The GTC is currently preparing for our Spring Business Meeting, which will be held from 6-8 pm on April 22, 2011 at the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission office at 1105 SW Williston Rd, Gainesville, Florida. We will be discussing business, grant funding, ways to reach new members, and how to promote participation and attendance at the upcoming annual meeting. For those who cannot be present at the business meeting, we hope to post a call-in number on our web site ([www.gophertortoiseCouncil.org](http://www.gophertortoiseCouncil.org)) in advance of the meeting.

Lastly, I am pleased to announce that the **33<sup>rd</sup> Annual Gopher Tortoise Council Meeting** will be held at the **Wyndham Orlando Resort (WOR) on October 14-16, 2011**. The theme of this year's meeting will be "Gopher Tortoise Conservation - Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow." The Fall Business Meeting will be held at Augustine's Restaurant at WOR the evening of October 13<sup>th</sup>, prior to the annual meeting. I hope that those who have participated in tortoise and commensal species conservation since the foundation of GTC, present day conservationists and those with an eye to the future of tortoise and commensal species preservation will dedicate their time to presenting on our successes and future endeavors at the meeting. I encourage all members to attend, because I believe this year's annual meeting will be an anchor point for tortoise protection in the next decade and beyond. I look forward to seeing you all in Orlando!!!

## EDUCATION REPORT

Laura Wewerka



The biggest accomplishment since my last report is that after two years, we have a new brochure! This one is called "Living with Tortoises" and it has simple suggestions of things that homeowners and landowners can do to benefit tortoises living in their area. Many thanks to the numerous GTC members who helped edit the brochure and donated photos. The brochure should be available on the GTC website soon, or feel free to email me (wewerka@embarqmail.com) and I will send you an electronic copy. I have already been in contact with the Florida state park system for distribution of the brochures, but would really like to get more of them out of my office and into parks/preserves/nature centers, etc. If you have any suggestions of people to contact, or would like me to send you a box, please let me know!



We have also had a couple of student groups that have done fund raisers over the past few months to benefit GTC. Odalys Garcia's 5<sup>th</sup> grade art students from Eustis Elementary School in Eustis, Florida did a project focusing on Native Americans, art, environmental concerns and service learning. The students made these really colorful clay turtles (see photos to the left) and sold them at the Central Florida Zoo during their "Party for the Planet" event. All donations from the event were given to the Gopher Tortoise Council.



Debra Quintero's 8<sup>th</sup> grade Science and Research class at St. Lucie West Middle School in Port St. Lucie, Florida is participating in the Disney Challenge and learning about numerous listed species. The "reptile group" contacted me through the GTC website to inquire about having a guest speaker. I visited the school in January and gave our power point program and then the students worked on activity pages about the gopher tortoise from the book by Zander Strodes (highlighted in the last issue of The Tortoise Burrow). The group had raised money over the previous weekend, which they donated to GTC. It was a fun day and the students were definitely interested in conservation. It was also great because some of the students in other groups (mammals and birds) were studying some of the other species associated with tortoise burrows.

Turtle art work by 5<sup>th</sup> graders at Eustis Elementary School

Finally, I want to thank members of GTC that have taken our display to various events over the past few months. The display has been on tour fairly regularly since October and has a couple more reservations through the end of May (although right now April is open). If you have any ideas of places that it could be shared, please let me know!

## Florida Scrub Jay Festival

Connie Henderson and Becky Bolt

The GTC participated in the second annual Florida Scrub Jay Festival hosted by the Merritt Island National Wildlife Refuge on February 12, 2011. Festival sponsors included the Merritt Island Wildlife Association, the Florida Scrub-Jay Consortium, CSI Signs and Ace Hardware. The Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, Merritt Island National Wildlife Refuge and the education committee of the Northeast Florida Scrub Working Group organized the event.

The Florida Scrub Jay is exclusively found in Florida and is listed as a threatened species due to loss of its native scrub habitat. Scrub habitat is characterized by deep, well-drained sandy soils that are typically white or nearly white. Historically, periodic fires maintained the scrub in a low, open condition favored by Scrub Jays, but now much of the scrub around the state is overgrown due to lack of fire and is no longer suitable for Scrub Jays.

Although it was a windy day, there was plenty of sunshine and activities. The festival offered live music, guided walks, animal displays, face painting and environmental exhibits. Numerous school groups from elementary to high school science classes participated in the activities. The GTC looks forward to participating again in 2012.



**EDUCATION REPORT cont'd**

**New GTC Brochure- Living with Gopher Tortoises**



**GET INVOLVED**

- ◆ Support conservation land acquisition programs by non-profit groups and government agencies.
- ◆ If your area does not have a land conservation program, work with others to get one started! Links to land acquisition programs can be found on the Gopher Tortoise Council website.
- ◆ Become a volunteer for organizations that manage uplands. Many are underfunded and understaffed.

***Most importantly, educate yourself so you are equipped to educate others!***

*Tortoises are a "keystone species," providing habitat for hundreds of other animals that use their burrows for finding food, shelter from fire and predators, and protection from the elements.*



**Gopher Tortoise Council**  
 c/o Florida Museum of Natural History  
 P.O. Box 117800  
 University of Florida  
 Gainesville, FL 32611  
[www.gophertortoiseCouncil.org](http://www.gophertortoiseCouncil.org)

The Gopher Tortoise Council was formed in 1978 by a group of biologists and others concerned about the range-wide decline of the gopher tortoise (*Gopherus polyphemus*).

*Members of the GTC provided photographs and assisted with the development of this brochure.*

LIVING WITH  
**GOPHER TORTOISES**

How YOU can help this declining species

*Working to conserve the gopher tortoise and the fascinating world in which it lives.*

*An educational brochure created by the Gopher Tortoise Council*

An array of turtles in a Largo pond. Photo by Jim Layfield, Courtesy of Tampa Bay Newspapers.



## GENERAL ANNOUNCEMENTS AND PRESS RELEASES

### **FWC resolution highlights gopher tortoise conservation**

#### **News Release**

Thursday, February 24, 2011

Media contact: Patricia Behnke, 850-251-2130

The Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) signed a resolution on February 24, 2011 in Apalachicola urging the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) to recognize Florida's strong conservation measures and actions to protect the gopher tortoise. The resolution asked the Service to not list the gopher tortoise in Florida as threatened under the U.S. Endangered Species Act.

Because the Service was petitioned to list the gopher tortoise as threatened in the eastern part of its range, including Florida, Georgia and Alabama, it is conducting a review to determine if the animal should be federally listed. The results of that review, which is required by law, are expected this year.

The FWC already lists the gopher tortoise as a state threatened species. The FWC and numerous stakeholders began implementing the Gopher Tortoise Management Plan in 2007 to ensure the species' future. Florida's Gopher Tortoise Conservation Program also includes Gopher Tortoise Permitting Guidelines and a rule that protects gopher tortoises and their burrows (homes).

"We have a great conservation blueprint in place in Florida. Having the species listed at the federal level would not add more conservation or protection than we already have. In fact, it could result in unnecessary regulatory burdens for the residents of Florida," said Rodney Barreto, FWC chairman. "Our plan was developed over several years with many partners who are helping implement the plan."

Dr. Elsa Haubold leads the FWC's Species Conservation Planning Section, which manages the gopher tortoise. Haubold said the Service is one of the FWC's most important partners in conserving threatened fish and wildlife. The FWC provided significant information to the Service, which included specific scientific and commercial data. The data provided to the Service demonstrates that Florida has provided significant conservation of the gopher tortoise, specifically as it relates to the five factors that are the basis for making a listing determination under the U.S. Endangered Species Act, Haubold noted.

"Florida's relatively new gopher tortoise program is already successfully conserving gopher tortoises," Haubold said. "Continuing to follow Florida's conservation blueprint will ensure that gopher tortoises are restored with secure, viable populations throughout their range in Florida." For more information about gopher tortoises in Florida, go to [MyFWC.com/GopherTortoise](http://MyFWC.com/GopherTortoise).



A gopher tortoise suns itself on the apron of its burrow in Walsingham Park, Largo, FL. Photo by Jim Layfield.

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**GENERAL ANNOUNCEMENTS****Jessica Gonynor McGuire****Web site updates!**

The GTC web site changes? Yes! In addition to the everyday housekeeping that goes on from year to year with the web site, we're doing our best to provide you with new resources and information. This year we have been fortunate to be given access to a number of educational materials which are available for download under the "Education" tab: two books, **The Gopher Tortoise** by Zander Srodes and the **Freshwater Turtle Adventure Activity** book by Montana Sewell are now available on the site. In addition we have a new brochure, "**Living with Gopher Tortoises**", which will soon be available for downloading from the site.

Past GTC annual meeting proceedings and newsletters have been scanned and will soon be available on our web site. So stay tuned and check the web site periodically to see what is new!

Finally, GTC now has a Facebook page. Please "like" us on Facebook. You can find us by searching for the "Gopher Tortoise Council".

Also be on the lookout for more details about the 2011 Annual Gopher Tortoise Council Meeting.

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

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**Donna J. Heinrich Environmental Education Grant**

**The deadline for all applications is August 31<sup>st</sup> 2011.**

Recipients will be announced at the GTC annual meeting in October 2011.

The GTC environmental education grant was established to support educators and organizations committed to developing educational projects about the gopher tortoise and the fascinating world in which it lives. The grant also honors Donna June Heinrich, an environmental educator whose life was dedicated to conserving wildlife and their associated habitats.

**Preference will be given to:**

- Projects that reach diverse and new audiences.
- Projects that focus on the importance of the conservation of intact upland ecosystems.
- Projects that encourage community involvement.
- Projects that have matching funds.

**NOTE:**

GTC's annual environmental education grant budget is \$4,000, with a maximum request per proposal of \$2,000.

A project summary for "The Tortoise Burrow" newsletter and either a presentation or poster at the following year's GTC annual meeting will be required.

Application forms are available on the GTC Web site: [www.gophertortoisecouncil.org](http://www.gophertortoisecouncil.org).

Send electronic applications to Laura Wewerka, Public Information & Education Chair at

[wewerka@embarqmail.com](mailto:wewerka@embarqmail.com).

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## GENERAL ANNOUNCEMENTS

### 2011 ALAPARC Meeting



This year's meeting of the Alabama Chapter of Partners in Amphibian and Reptile Conservation (ALAPARC) looks to bring about some changes. To keep things fresh and make the trip easier for those from northern Alabama, the location has been moved to Camp McDowell in the Bankhead National Forest. This should be a great location for herp outings during the day with presentations during the evening. And we won't forget time for socializing and beer drinking in the evening as well. To ensure good herping, the meeting date has also been changed to September 30th - October 2nd. We are still working on the cost, but we hope to keep the price within range of the previous two meetings to make it affordable for a variety of attendees. Keep a look-out on the ALAPARC website for more details (<http://www.alaparc.org/>).

## CURRENT RESEARCH

**Lentini, A.M., G.J. Crawshaw, L.E. Licht, and D.J. McLelland. 2011.** Pathologic and hematologic responses to surgically implanted transmitters in eastern massasauga rattlesnakes (*Sistrurus catenatus catenatus*). *Journal of Wildlife Diseases* 47(1): 107-125.

**McCoy, E.D., N. Ihász, E.J. Britt and H.R. Mushinsky . 2010.** Is the Florida Sand Skink (*Plestiodon reynoldsi*) a Dietary Specialist? *Herpetologica* 66(4): 432-442.

**Reinert, H.K., W.F. Munroe, C.E. Brennan, M.N. Rach, S. Pelesky, and L.M. Bushar. 2011.** Response of timber rattlesnakes to commercial logging operations. *Journal of Wildlife Management* 75(1):19-29.

**Rose, F.W., F.W. Judd, and M.F. Small. 2011.** Survivorship in two coastal populations of *Gopherus berlandieri*. *Journal of Herpetology* 45(1): 75-78.

**Tapley, B., R.A. R.A. Griffiths, and I. Bride, 2011.** Dynamics of the trade in reptiles and amphibians within the United Kingdom over a ten-year period. *The Herpetological Journal* 21(1): 27-34.

The Florida sand skink is a small fossorial lizard that occurs on the sandy ridges of interior central Florida from Marion County south to Highlands County.



## GENERAL ANNOUNCEMENTS

### GTC MEMBERSHIP RENEWAL

The following membership categories are available:

Student: \$15	Corporation/Society: \$50
Regular Membership: \$25	Sustaining: \$75
Contributor: \$40	Life Membership: \$300

Membership benefits include a subscription to the Gopher Tortoise Council's newsletter, The Tortoise Burrow. Your membership contributions also support our student awards and education grants. The Gopher Tortoise Council is a nonprofit organization and all contributions are tax deductible. The easiest way to join or maintain your membership is to use the secure PayPal method provided on our web site ([www.gophertortoisecouncil.org](http://www.gophertortoisecouncil.org)). If you prefer to mail your payment, forms can be downloaded on the web site and sent to:

Gopher Tortoise Council  
c/o Florida Museum of Natural History  
P.O. Box 117800, University of Florida  
Gainesville, FL 32611

**GTC NEEDS YOU– PLEASE RENEW YOUR MEMBERSHIP TODAY!!**

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### GTC is now accepting applications for the 2011

#### J. Larry Landers Student Research Award

The J. Larry Landers Student Research Award is a Gopher Tortoise Council competitive grant program for undergraduate and graduate college students. Proposals can address research concerning gopher tortoise biology or any other relevant aspect of upland habitat conservation and management. The amount of the award is variable, but has averaged \$1,000.00 over the last few years.

The proposal should be limited to four pages in length and should include a description of the project, a concise budget, and a brief resume of the student.

This is an excellent opportunity for undergraduate and graduate students to access funding for their projects. The deadline for grant proposals each year is the 15th of September.

Please send submissions to:

Bob Herrington, PhD  
Department of Biology  
Georgia Southwestern State University  
Americus, GA, 31709  
229-931-2331; bherring@canes.gsw.edu



## *Newsletter of The Gopher Tortoise Council*

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Directory of 2011 Gopher Tortoise Council Officers,  
Committee Chairs, and State Representatives  
Please view the GTC website (below) for contact information

### **Co-chairs**

Dave Steen

Ron Concoby

### **Secretary**

Connie Henderson

### **Membership Secretary**

Will Knox

### **Treasurer**

Don Stillwaugh

### **Newsletter Editor**

Lora Smith

### **Website Manager**

Jessica Gonynor McGuire

### **GTC Representative to PARC**

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### **Standing Committee Chairs**

### **Nominating Committee**

Joan Berish

### **Public Information and Education Committee**

Laura Wewerka

### **Upland Snake Conservation Committee**

Jayme Waldron

Kimberly Andrews

### **Return Address:**

Joseph W. Jones Ecological Research Center  
3988 Jones Center Drive  
Newton GA 39870

### **State Representatives**

#### *Alabama*

Mark Bailey

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Joan Berish

#### *Georgia*

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#### *South Carolina*

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## **The Tortoise Burrow**

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<http://www.gophertortoisecouncil.org>

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*The Tortoise Burrow* is published in December, April and August. Deadlines for submission of announcements and articles are the 15th of the preceding month. Send materials to the editor:

Lora Smith

[lora.smith@jonesctr.org](mailto:lora.smith@jonesctr.org)

Decisions concerning publication of submitted material rest with the editor and co-chairs.

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The GTC reserves the right to approve editorial changes prior to re-printing and requests that reprints credit *The Tortoise Burrow, Newsletter of the Gopher Tortoise Council*.

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