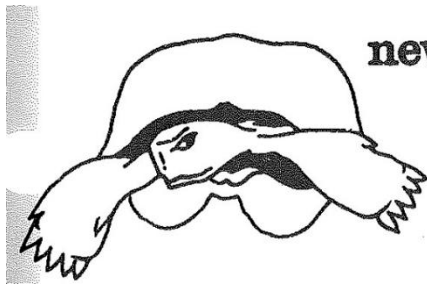




This is a reproduction of a previous Gopher Tortoise Council newsletter. This document has been altered from its original presentation so that information, news, and notable content can be preserved. Formatting, spelling, and grammar have been maintained to the extent possible. If possible, original images from the document have been included in these reproductions. The current and recent newsletters of the Gopher Tortoise Council, *The Tortoise Burrow*, can be found on the Council's website [here](#). Personal information, such as addresses and phone numbers have been redacted from this document.



newsletter of the GOPHER TORTOISE COUNCIL

Image: Original artwork and letterhead for the newsletter of the Gopher Tortoise Council

GOPHER TORTOISE COUNCIL/ALL FLORIDA HERP CONFERENCE A SMASHING SUCCESS

More than 200 people attended our meeting on November 10, many of whom engaged the speakers in some lively question-and-answer session. The program was supplemented by some unannounced speakers. Lisa Davis of the General Development Corporation described her field surveys of land to be developed; she said that data collected by the surveys are used by the company to protect or relocate rare, threatened, and endangered species. At the evening social, which featured magnificent chili prepared by Lee Franz and helpers, two slide shows were presented: Dale Jackson showed pictures of the recent gopher tortoise races in San Antonio, Florida, and Peter Meyland talked about his work excavating fossil tortoises in Africa. Our thanks go to the speakers who so generously donated their time and travel and to Dick Franz for his splendid job organizing everything.

STUDENT AWARD ANNOUNCED – DEADLINE FOR PROPOSALS CHANGED

At the conference the Council announced the establishment of an annual award to be given to an undergraduate or graduate student for research on the gopher tortoise. This year the award will be \$200. PLEASE NOTE that the new deadline for submitting proposals is MARCH 15, 1980. Proposals should be three pages or less and should include a brief biography of the applicant, description, and justification of the research, and a budget. Send proposals to Dr. Howard Campbell, National Fish and Wildlife Laboratory, #### ## ##### Avenue, Room 250, Gainesville, Florida 32601.

ELECTION RESULTS

In November balloting Dr. Robert Mount, Professor of Zoology and Entomology at Auburn University, was unanimously elected co-chairperson. Dr. Mount said that one of the aims of the Council is to bring to the public's attention both the difficulties faced by the gopher tortoise and the activities of the Council in behalf of the species. He believes that the best way to improve tortoise protection is to encourage cooperation between the Council and the managers of federal, state, and private lands. Dr. Mount said that the Council is not currently trying to get federal listing of the tortoise as a threatened or endangered species, but if the cooperative approach doesn't succeed, such a listing might be sought. (Dr. Mount replaces Dr. Nora Deitlein, who recently resigned.)

COUNCIL OFFICERS ACTIONS

Pursuant officers of the Gopher Tortoise Council's policy of enhancing tortoise protection by positive action, the officers of the Gopher Tortoise Council made several resolutions at its December meeting. The officers of the Gopher Tortoise Council moved to inform the managers of federally owned lands in the South as well as the conservation and forestry departments of Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, and Mississippi of the plight of the gopher tortoise; to ask them to ban collection, possession, and harassment on lands within their jurisdiction and to prohibit gassing of burrows; and to consider tortoise welfare in their management practices. In another resolution the officers of the Gopher Tortoise Council extended its appreciation to the International Paper Company for its actions to protect the habitat of several declining species and for its study of the gopher tortoise (see Vol 1, No. 3). Finally, the officers of the Gopher Tortoise Council commended the State of South Carolina for listing the gopher tortoise as a fully protected species and commended the State of Florida for outlawing burrow-gassing. Copies of the resolution were sent to the appropriate state, federal, and corporate officials.

NATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS FOCUS ON GOPHERUS SPECIES

Defenders of Wildlife Magazine published "Trials of the Tortoise" by Cynthia England in its August 1979 issue. The article documented the downfall of Fort Myers' (Florida) tortoise race and was accompanied by Charles Utz's excellent photos of ridiculously decorated tortoises and of a tortoise wounded when pulled from its burrow. The article also described the Council and outlined protection efforts underway in Florida. The Nature Conservancy News for November/December 1979 included Dr. Kristin Berry's "Tortoises for Tomorrow," which describes the ecology and problems of the desert tortoise. The Conservancy has adopted the Desert Tortoise Preserve Committee (of which Dr. Berry is a founder) as part of its organization and is currently working toward acquiring desert tortoise habitat currently in private ownership.

FROM BETTE MECHEL'S OPENING REMARKS AT THE CONFERENCE

"I would like to quote from a handbook, something which some of us may have forgotten. 'The gopher is on the whole a valuable and very personable animal. In the three westernmost counties of the Florida panhandle an act was passed ... that made it unlawful to take or sell any gophers during the months of May, June, July, and August, and which prohibited the selling of any gopher with an under-shell length of less than 9 inches. With this act as precedent, some sort of protection for the fast-diminishing remnant of the once abundant population might be feasible. It would most certainly be desirable.' This quote is from Archie Carr's Handbook of Turtles, published in 1952, and the act he refers to was passed in 1909. Seventy years later, land alteration continues at an alarming pace. Florida's population in 1910 was 753,000 and these people were mostly concentrated along the coast, leaving the sand ridges and scrub-oak ridges to nature. The population in Florida in 1975 was 8,283,074 with an ever increasing curve, while the tortoise's habitat shows a declining curve ... The membership of this Council has its work cut out for it. I hope that the council will grow in structure and number and this stimulate interest in saving the tortoises and their habitat ... We have a long way to go, but through your efforts the gopher tortoise has a chance. The tortoise has a good image – an animal people can rally around even though uninterested in other reptiles. Since it is central to the ecology of a number of animals, your efforts will not only save the tortoise, but an entire ecological niche as well."

DOES YOUR LOCAL GOVERNMENT HAVE AN ORDINANCE TO PROTECT RARE OR ENDANGERED SPECIES? If so, please send a copy of it to Karla Heimann, ##### Street, Gainesville, FL 32601. She is assembling material from which to prepare a model tortoise protection ordinance for use of any interested local government or organization. SEND NEWS

OF INTEREST TO COUNCIL MEMBERS to Karla or to Roger Weill at the Mississippi
Museum of Natural Science, ##### Street, Jackson, MS 39202.

This document was created and transcribed by Bradley O'Hanlon
December 2025