



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.

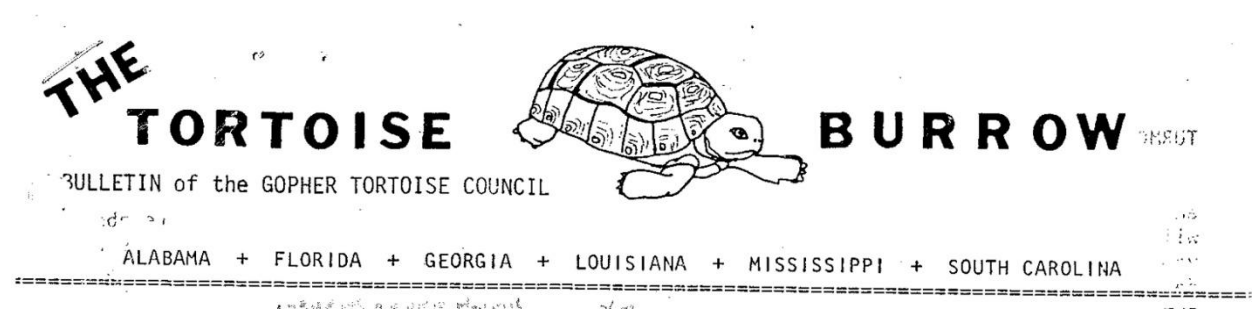


Image: Original artwork and letterhead for the newsletter of the Gopher Tortoise Council

UNLIKELY PAIR WORK TOGETHER IN RESEARCH OF GOPHER TORTOISE

CAMP BLANDING (AP) - - At first glance, they are an odd couple. It's a mutual interest in gopher tortoises that brings them together. For Rufus Stratton, retired firefighter from St. Augustine, the lure is culinary. "I started pulling gophers with my daddy, pulled them to eat back during the Depression," he says. They've got two big chunks of meat. The neck, legs, heart, liver and tripe go into the stew. Then you put in some potatoes, onions, bell pepper and a couple of datil peppers."

Joan Deimer's interest is more cerebral. She's a biologist for the Florida Game and Fresh Water Fish Commission, who studies the animals to determine if they need additional state protection. Miss Deimer and Stratton teamed up late last month (in March) on a cast sandhill in Camp Blanding to pull gopher tortoises from their earthly lairs - - for her purposes, not his. Stratton carried a plastic pipe with a metal hook on the end to pull the gophers from their burrows. Miss Deimer and Stratton had 47 burrows to check. She was out to measure the males for growth. The females she would take to Shands Hospital in Gainesville to X-ray for eggs. All would be returned to their holes.

The Biologist was particularly concerned with probing the population at the top of the hill where Richard Franz, a Florida State Museum biologist, had transplanted 28 tortoises five years ago when their homeland was about to be mined. Franz was on hand to help the count.

“Gophers would make a good subject for children’s literature,” Franz said. “The people in rural areas have respect for them. They were a mainstay during the Depression. “A 15-pound gopher has about 1 ½ pound of meat,” he said. “He’s full and fat as can be in the spring when he first comes out of his burrow, and again in October before he goes down for the winter,” Stratton said.

Scientist and pragmatist traded points of view during a morning hike across dry, crackling grass from one numbered, red-flagged burrow to another. At No. 8 Stratton’s 20-foot white tail pipe began whipping around as he pushed it into the burrow, which can run 30 feet in length. “He’s turned. I might could get him out. After you’ve pulled so many you can tell how they laying in their hole,” he said.

A mahogany-shelled old tortoise was pulled grudgingly from the hole, hind end first. “Male,” Miss Deimer said as she noted the gopher’s concave undershell. Franz was encouraged to find it had markings to show it was one he had transplanted.

Among other things, Miss Diemer wants to learn the size of the animals’ population, how long they live, how many eggs they lay, how many hatchlings survive and whether they can be relocated. “We’re just beginning to unlock some of their secrets,” she said.

In some states, the gopher is considered an endangered or threatened species. In others, there is open season on them. In Florida, the possession limit is five a day per person without a special permit. They cannot be sold, and the season is closed from April to June for mating. (Above printed in the Ocala Star-Banner Wednesday, April 6, 1983)

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Dr. Harold Wahlquist from Atlanta reports that on February 8, 1983 he presented a slide talk on THE GOPHER TORTOISE AND THE ECOLOGY OF THE COAST PLAINS SANDHILLS to the Atlanta Audubon Society. The talk was well received by an audience of approximately 100 persons.

NOTICE OF STUDENT AWARD

The Gopher Tortoise Council annually presents a cash award to an undergraduate, graduate or exceptional high school student who is planning or actively conducting research involving the gopher tortoise *Gopherus polyphemus*. The amount of the award varies from year

to year depending on the Council's finances; approximately \$400.00 is available for the 1982-1983 award.

The only obligation of the recipient, other than conducting the proposed research, is to submit to the Council a copy of his/her final report within six (6) months of the project completion date and copies of any scientific papers resulting from the research. The recipient is invited to present his/her results at the Council's next annual meeting.

Proposals should be short, not more than four (4) typed (double-spaced) pages, and should include a brief biological section (or resume), a description and justification of the research, and a budget indicating how the money will be spent. If the project is research leading toward a degree, please state degree sought and research advisor.

Proposals should be sent to Dr. Dale R. Jackson, Florida Natural Areas Inventory, ### #. #th Avenue, Tallahassee, FL 32303 by 1 September 1983. Proposals will be reviewed by members of the Council's Research Advisory Committee who will submit their recommendations to the Executive Committee. The Council will announce the recipient of the award at its annual meeting.

Renée M. Priest
Secretary, GTC

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FLOODING OF GOPHER TORTOISE BURROWS MAY BE BENEFICIAL

(From Florida Wildlife Magazine, January-February 1983)

How does the gopher tortoise fare when his burrow home is flooded in winter? Apparently very well, according to observations made over a four-year period by Dr. Bruce Means, director of Tall Timbers Research Station near Tallahassee.

The tortoise is well-known in the Southeast because its burrow also is the home of many other animals, including the diamondback rattlesnake, pine snake, indigo snake, gopher frog, and many insects.

Dr. means and J. B. Atkinson, also of Tall Timbers, made more than 2,860 observations in burrows. "When water was observed in burrows," the research station head said, "tortoises usually were in them. Seventy percent of the time that tortoises were seen immersed in water in burrows, they were either completely submerged or had no more than just their heads and front limbs exposed to the air."

The study showed that the gopher may have become secondarily adapted to water in burrows, since flooding is always possible. If the tortoise was intolerant of water, it would be

forced into harsh winter temperatures. Besides, it was pointed out, the animal, if stranded on the ground, would be vulnerable to predators.

The study by Dr. Means supports a hypothesis that tortoises seek burrows in moderately moist soil "to gain some benefit from increased burrow moisture during winter. The evidence," concluded Dr. Means, "hints that burrow flooding may be beneficial."

GOPHER TORTOISE COUNCIL AWARD

Dr. Robert Mount, of Auburn University (Alabama) reports that a Gopher Tortoise Council Award was given to Charles D. Kelley, Chief of Game and Fish, Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources. It was the first award to be presented, and Richard Franz, of the Florida State Museum in Gainesville has been designated to be the second recipient. The award was a framed print of a gopher tortoise by Chuck Carr. Carr was commissioned by the Council, through a grant from Bernard and Bette Bechtel, of Valdosta, Ga., to produce the original.

The inscription on the plaque accompanying Kelly's award read: "Presented to Charles D. Kelley for his dedication to conserving the Gopher Tortoise in Alabama and for his efforts to promote the welfare of his State's non-game wildlife."

Bob mount also advises that James Dobie of Auburn recently investigated a report of a sizeable number of dead gophers in a forested region of Washington County, Alabama. An on-site investigation confirmed the report. The tortoises had died, apparently last summer or fall, outside their burrows, and the shells showed no signs of predation, human or otherwise. Dobie plans to conduct a follow-up study this spring when the gophers emerge from hibernation.

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TURMOIL OF THE TERRAPINS

By Janet Rodekohr

The word is out about Rod Berger's tortoise reserve. People throughout the area drive up day or night with a gopher tortoise on the floor or in a bag, a box or a bucket of water.

Rod says, "The gopher tortoise is a land turtle. It can't swim. In fact, it sinks like a rock. If they have it in a bucket of water, you'll see too little nostrils peeking out of the water, struggling for air. But we still appreciate the donation." He takes the tortoise no matter what because he doesn't see much help coming to add this protected species to the endangered list. As Rod says, "Most national reports say that things are improving for the gopher tortoise. But they are completely dependent for their survival on their habitat. If timber prices go up, tortoise

populations can drop drastically. Prices are down now so they look good. But that could change quickly. I think they should be on the endangered species list.”

Jeff Jackson, Georgia Extension Service wildlife specialist, defines terms. He says the endangered species title is designated for those in imminent danger of passing from the face of this earth. “Threatened” means scientists are watching this species carefully. If numbers drop or somehow go out of balance, the species may go on the endangered list. The gopher tortoise is listed in Georgia, Florida, and other southern states as a protected species. It is declining in numbers. It’s not alone. Some other southeastern species kept under watchful eye include the pine barrens treefrog, the gopher frog, the indigo snake, the wood stork, the bald eagle, the ivory-billed woodpecker, the mangrove fox squirrel, the Florida blackbear and panther, the West Indian manatee and the Key deer. The U.S. Department of the interior can give you more information about endangered and threatened species. If you’re interested, here’s what you can do.

Write to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service for a list of federally-protected endangered and threatened species. Visit a national wildlife refuge to find out more about wildlife and their needs. Join a conservation group. Find out about wildlife and conservation issues in your area. Don’t buy products made from protected wildlife. The commercial demand could endanger a scarce animal. Report violations of wildlife laws to your local game warden. For more information, write to:

Regional Director
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
Richard B. Russell Federal Building
Street, #.#.
Atlanta, GA 30303

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Treasurer Dr. Robert W. Taylor reports the treasury balance as of 11 April 1983 is \$997.39. Let us all work toward increasing the treasure funds so that more good work can be done for the gopher tortoise. It would be great if each member could be responsible for getting one new member. Send membership envelopes, with dues information, to your correspondents and also verbally publicize the work that the Gopher Tortoise Council is attempting to do for the tortoise. Please let me hear from member states, other than Florida, Georgia and Alabama, with news of what your states are doing for conservation so it may be included in the next issue of The TORTOISE BURROW. Kindly send material for the newsletter directly to the editor, Ellen B. Nicol, Rt. #, Box #####, Anthony, FL 32617.

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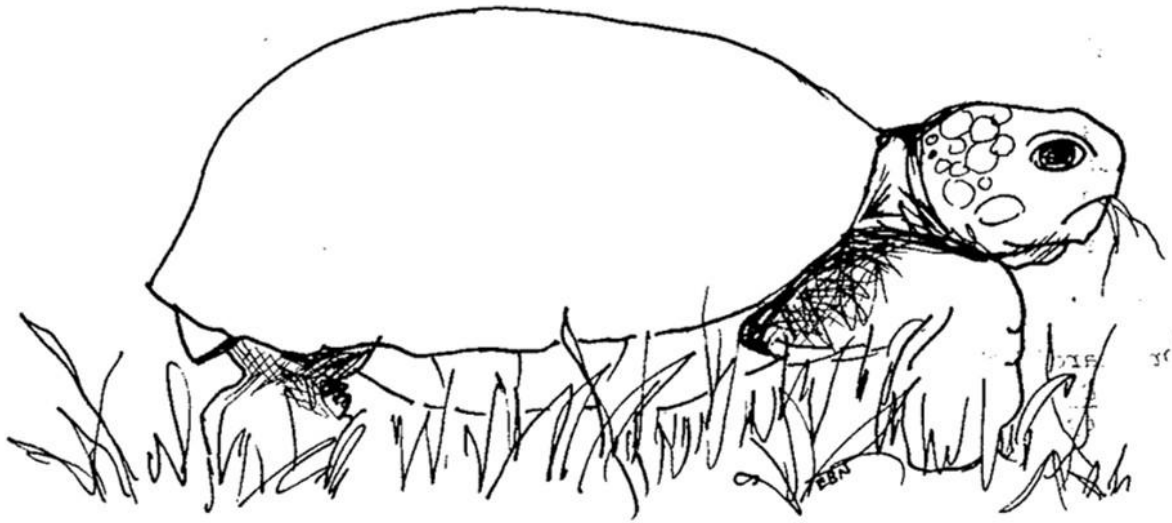


Image: Original artwork for the newsletter of the Gopher Tortoise Council by Ellen B. Nicol.

This document was created and transcribed by Bradley O'Hanlon
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