



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.

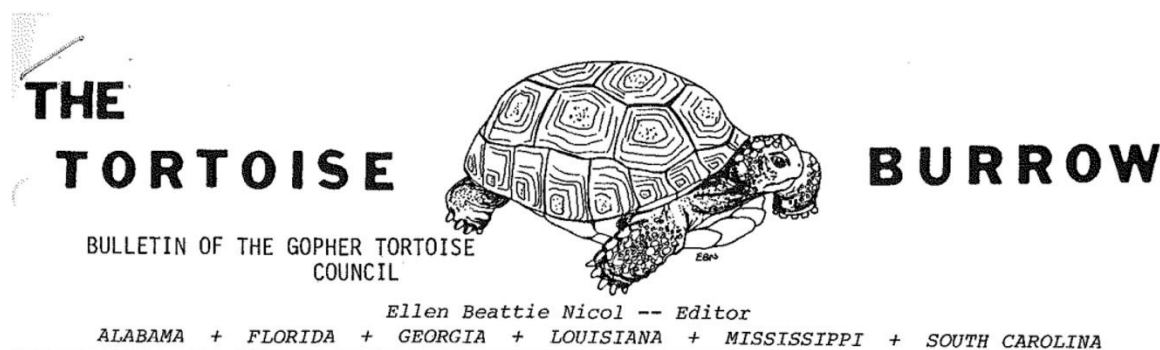


Image: Original artwork and letterhead for the newsletter of the Gopher Tortoise Council

1984 Post Annual Meeting Issue 1984

Gainesville, Florida – Nov. 9 – 10

AN INTRODUCTION TO THE NEW GTC CO-CHAIRMAN

Term: 1984 to 1986 Dr. Robert Mount, Professor of Zoology, Auburn University, Auburn, AL 36849

Bob Mount was born in Lewisburg, TN on 25 December 1931. He received his B.S. and M.S. Degrees at Auburn University, 1954 and 1956; and his Ph.D. at the University of Florida in 1961 (Dr. Archie Carr). Early employment was at Montevallo University, 1961 to 1966; and currently at Auburn University since 1966 as Professor of Zoology.

Research Interests: Natural history of Southeast, with emphasis on herpetology. He has several publications, including "Reptiles and Amphibians of Alabama", 1975 and his latest "Vertebrate

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Several of the intermediate goals of the Council have still not been realized and are, in my opinion, worthy of vigorous pursuit within the immediate future. Prohibitions against taking or killing of gophers on all federally owned lands are clearly warranted and should be instituted. Increased emphasis on enforcement of existing state statutes and regulations relating to gopher conservation in some states is badly needed and, I believe, attainable. The situation in Louisiana is frustrating and will probably continue to be so unless we can generate far more support from

biologists and conservation-minded citizens in that state than we have been able to generate so far. The fate of the small Louisiana population now appears to rest in the hands of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries.

Florida still permits limited taking and killing of gophers as if the species were just another game animal for which management objectives and plans had been developed. But this anachronism is manifestly inconsistent with that state's otherwise admirable record of achievement in the area of wildlife conservation, and I am optimistic that wildlife authorities in Tallahassee will move to correct it in relatively short order. In this regard, communications from Florida Council members to their legislators and to the Florida Game and Fresh Water Fish Commission will help.

Two ominous threats to the tortoise and its habitats may become increasingly important in the relatively near future. Some foresters are attempting to convert natural scrub and sandhill associations into even-aged, closely-spaced sand pine plantations. When the canopy closes in these plantations, they become unsuitable for gophers (and for that matter, almost everything else). Susceptibility of sand pine plantations to devastating fires, however, may deter many foresters from attempting to engage in sand pine monoculture.

The other threat involves the possibility of extensive aerial application of herbicides over forestland to kill hardwood trees and sprouts and other plants that may compete with pines. If such a practice becomes widespread, or appears likely to become so, it can safely be predicted that an environmental controversy of major proportions will erupt.

I am happy to see among our membership an interested and enthusiastic contingent of young people. I am disappointed, however, that the older conservationists and natural historians of our region are not better represented among the Council's more active members. As one of the "Old Guard" myself, I fully appreciate that time constraints become increasingly restrictive through the years and that national and international issues tend to distract us from things that are happening in our own back yards. But the Council badly needs the knowledge, wisdom and, in some cases quite frankly, the political influence and prestige that the older conservationists can provide. Those of us who were privileged to grow up during an era when we thought we could take the South's natural heritage for granted have an obligation to help save some of it for future generations.

I look forward with optimism to working with Dale Jackson, Ellen Nicol and other Council leaders and members during the coming year. I am confident that we can continue to make

Bob Mount

MEETING REPORT

Following are copies of Resolutions sent to various states:

RESOLUTION

WHEREAS, the Game and Fish Division of the Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources is energetically administering a program dedicated to the conservation of the State's nongame wildlife; and

WHEREAS, there is every indication that the program will be a success; and

WHEREAS, the Gopher Tortoise Council is concerned over the continued survival and well-being of the gopher tortoise and all other components of the native wildlife heritage of the Southeast; now be it therefore

RESOLVED, that the Gopher Tortoise Council at its 1984 Annual Meeting at Gainesville, Florida on 10 November 1984 wishes to salute and commend Mr. Charles D. Kelley, Director of Game and Fish, and Mr. J. W. ("Tappy") Hodnett, Commissioner of Conservation and Natural Resources, State of Alabama, for their dedication to the conservation of nongame species in Alabama; and be it furthermore

RESOLVED, that the Council respectfully urges the Governor of the State of Alabama to lend his strong support to Commissioner Hodnett and Director Kelley in their efforts to ensure that the quality of Alabama's natural environment is maintained for the enjoyment and health of present and future generations of the State's citizens.

Dated: 20 November 1984

Dale R. Jackson

Robert H. Mount

Co-Chairpersons
The Gopher Tortoise Council

RESOLUTION

WHEREAS, it is widely recognized among conservationists that the State of Florida has been a leader among states of the Southeastern Region in matters relating to wildlife conservation; and

WHEREAS, The Gopher Tortoise Council salutes and commends those officials and employees of the State of Florida, past and present, who have contributed to the successes of the State's wildlife conservation programs; and

WHEREAS, the gopher tortoise is an important component of the wildlife heritage of Florida and the Southeast; and

WHEREAS, gopher tortoise populations continue to decline seriously in virtually every portion of the species' range, including Florida; and

WHEREAS, the existing regulations in Florida relating to the taking and possession of gopher tortoises, in the Council's opinion, cannot be justified either on a scientific or socioeconomic basis; now be it therefore

RESOLVED, that the Gopher Tortoise Council at its 1984 Annual Meeting held on 10 November 1984, in Gainesville, Florida, respectively urges the Florida Game and Fresh Water Fish Commission to declare a moratorium on the taking and/or possession of gopher tortoises for any reason other than legitimate scientific or educational purposes until such time as it can be scientifically documented that taking and/or possession for other purposes will not contribute to the continuing decline of the species; and be it further

RESOLVED, that copies of this Resolution be sent to the Executive Director of the Florida Game and Fresh Water Fish Commission; to the Executive Director of the Department of Natural Resources; to the Governor of the State of Florida; to the Director of the Florida State Museum; and to the chief administrative officers of Florida Defenders of the Environment and the Florida Audubon Society.

Dated: 20 November 1984

Dale R. Jackson
Robert H. Mount

Co-chairpersons
The Gopher Tortoise Council

RESOLUTION

WHEREAS, the Director of the Game and Fish Division of the Georgia Department of Natural Resources informed a delegation of Gopher Tortoise Council members that the gopher tortoise is officially a protected species in the State of Georgia; and

WHEREAS, numerous and continuing reports from the State of Georgia suggest that lack of awareness and/or misunderstanding of the laws or regulations as they affect gopher tortoises is widespread in southern Georgia; and

WHEREAS, it is incumbent upon the Game and Fish Division to acquaint the public with the state laws and regulations that protect nongame wildlife species as well as game species in Georgia and to enforce the provisions of such laws and regulations; now be it therefore

RESOLVED, that the Gopher Tortoise Council at its 1984 Annual Meeting on 10 November 1984 in Gainesville, Florida respectfully urges the Georgia Game and Fish Commission to (1) intensify its efforts to educate the public of the State of Georgia with regard to existing statutes and regulations that protect the gopher tortoise and other components of the State's nongame wildlife; and (2) to direct wildlife law enforcement personnel to exercise greater diligence in detecting, apprehending and prosecuting violators of Georgia nongame wildlife statutes and regulations; and be it furthermore

RESOLVED, that copies of this Resolution be sent to the Director of the Game and Fish Division, to the Governor of the State of Georgia; and to the chief administrative officer of The Georgia Conservancy.

Dated: 20 November 1984

Dale R. Jackson
Robert H. Mount

Co-chairpersons
The Gopher Tortoise Council

RESOLUTION

WHEREAS, The Department of Conservation of the State of Mississippi has declared the gopher tortoise to be endangered in that State; and

WHEREAS, the United States Forest Service has recognized that special conservation efforts are warranted in the case of the gopher tortoise, not only in Mississippi, but in other portions of the southeastern region of the country; and

WHEREAS, the Forest Service is interested in the affairs of The Gopher Tortoise Council, as is Indicated by its commendable actions to ensure that the agency is represented at the Council's annual meetings; and

WHEREAS, efforts to protect the gopher tortoise in Mississippi would be enhanced substantially by federal protection of the gopher tortoise in the DeSoto National Forest, which has been estimated to contain up to one-half of the gopher population In Mississippi; and

WHEREAS, such protection can be afforded by one or more directives from the Forest Supervisor of National Forests in Mississippi; now be it therefore

RESOLVED, that the Gopher Tortoise Council at Its 1984 Annual Meeting on 10 November 1984 In Gainesville, Florida, respectfully urges the Forest Supervisor to issue a directive or directives that would (1) prohibit the taking, possession, molestation or harrassment of gopher tortoises In DeSoto National Forest, and (2) prohibit the introduction of poisons and/or intoxicating materials, such as gasoline, into burrows constructed by, but not necessarily inhabited by, gopher tortoises; and be it furthermore

RESOLVED, that copies of this Resolution be sent to the Forest Supervisor of National Forests in Mississippi; to appropriate administrators of the Forest Service at the regional and national levels; and to the Secretary of the United States Department of Agriculture.

Dated: 20 November 1984

Dale R. Jackson
Robert H. Mount

Co-chairpersons
The Gopher Tortoise Council

RESOLUTION

WHEREAS, The Gopher Tortoise Council is a professional organization composed of scientists and other concerned individuals interested in the biology of the gopher tortoise (Gopherus polyphemus), and its habitat; and

WHEREAS, Drs. Ren Lohofener and Lynne Lohmier have petitioned the Director of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service In July 1984, to list those populations of the gopher tortoise in Alabama, Mississippi and Louisiana that occur west of the Mobile and Tombigbee Rivers as an endangered species; and

WHEREAS, a careful assessment of the present distribution, abundance and cumulative threats to these tortoise populations indicates that severe declines have occurred and are expected to intensify in the future; and

BE IT RESOLVED, that The Gopher Tortoise Council, at its 1984 Annual Meeting on 10 November 1984, in Gainesville, Florida, urges the Director of the Service to list the populations of the gopher tortoise occurring west of the Tombigbee River as an endangered species under provisions of the Endangered Species Act of 1973 at the earliest possible time and to develop appropriate recovery actions in concert with Federal and State agencies, and all other interested persons, to insure the survival of these populations.

Co-chairpersons
The Gopher Tortoise Council

GEORGIA-PACIFIC DONATES LAND TO SOUTH CAROLINA NATURE CONSERVANCY

According to Mortensen, "Georgia-Pacific's donation consists of a large portion of the gopher tortoise habitat within the Tillman Sand Ridge of Jasper County. This property makes up the northern extreme of the tortoise's natural range and contains South Carolina's only natural population of the gopher tortoise." Mortensen further stated, "In keeping with Georgia-Pacific's long tradition of cooperation with the South Carolina Nature Conservancy we are indeed proud to make this donation."

Due to the assemblage of these rare animal and plant species, the Tillman Sand Ridge area has been designated as a Protected Priority site by the South Carolina Nature Conservancy and the S.C. Heritage Trust Program of the S.C. Wildlife and Marine Resources Department. The Nature Conservancy has worked with Georgia-Pacific for several years on the protection of the Jasper County site, which will now become a state preserve for these unique plants and animal species.

Gopher tortoises originated in western North America some 60 million years ago. Of the approximately 23 species that existed, only four species of “gopher” remain today. Most species are extinct and are known only by their fossils. It is estimated by the South Carolina Heritage Trust Program that only 1700 tortoises remain in the state. The gopher tortoise was protected by the South Carolina Endangered Species act of 1975.

APPRECIATION GOES A LONG WAY

However, others have contributed support over and above the minimum \$10.00 membership fee or in other meaningful ways and these efforts are as important as mine. Our thanks to:

Bern and Bette Bechtel – GA
Gerald Berenson – LA
John Burris – MS
Kathleen Cantwell – FL
Marc Colen – CA
Mark Davidovich – CA
Henry Gregory – MO
Ed Herrmann (R.A.G.E.) – FL
David Kavanagh – CA
Roger Wernicke – FL
Janet Floyd – FL

Ren Lohofener - MS
John Marshall – AL
Noel Mills – LA
Orlando Herp Club – FL
Irene Osthoff – MO
Win Seyle – GA
Stanley Shimer – FL
Edna Talmor – FL
H. and S. Walquist – GA
Thad Waites – LA
D. and L. Young – TN

Special thanks are in order to Rhoda Bryant at FSM for her work on producing the Proceedings of the annual meetings, to Dick Franz for hosting the meeting and for the tour of his territory on Sunday morning at the Preserve, and to Janet M. Floyd, my friend from Ocala who helped so faithfully when things got hectic at the registration table. Joan Diemer and Catherine Puckett were largely responsible for the fine assortment of snacks and sweets at the social Friday evening. Gratitude also goes to the Florida GFWFC for offering the use of their facilities for the Friday get-together. And don't forget my husband, Bob, who never complains about my involvement and the much time I spend working for the GTC.

IMPORTANT!! OUR MEMBERSHIP YEAR BEGINS NOW IMPORTANT!!

Although membership envelopes were sent and notice given in the last TORTOISE BURROW that renewal time is here, many have not renewed. Some did at the meeting. Our very limited budget makes it imperative that we send our publications only to those who are interested enough to contribute at least the minimum membership fee of \$10.00. We officers gladly donate our services, but the post office and the printer do not. Our year starts in December, not from the time you joined. As you can see from material in this issue, the GTC has embarked on some ambitious projects and we hope you won't want to miss out on the developments and progress that will be reported in future issues.

An envelope is being included in this jumbo issue, as it was in the last TTB. If you have not joined or renewed, won't you please use it to do so now. If you have joined for 1985, perhaps you

could give the envelope to some potential member. If the box at right is colored in red, it means we have no record of your membership for 1985 and this will be your final issue. We need your support -- please don't let us down.

NEW WILDLIFE BOOK AVAILABLE

A book, "Vertebrate Wildlife of Alabama," was recently published by the Alabama Agricultural Experiment Station in cooperation with the newly created Alabama Non-game Wildlife Program. The book is edited by our own GTC Co-chairman, Robert Mount, and is color illustrated and documents the habitat and status of little-known fishes, birds, reptiles, amphibians and small animals. It includes many species rarely seen by man, and others, like the American bald eagle, that most people don't realize are native to Alabama. "Vertebrate Wildlife of Alabama" can be ordered for \$4.00 by mail from: Department of Research Information, ### Comer Hall, Auburn University; Auburn Univ., AL 36849.

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The 1983 meeting Proceedings will soon be mailed. These Proceedings are part of the membership benefits, along with quarterly issues of THE TORTOISE BURROW. We have Proceedings from the 1981 and 1982 meetings available for \$8.00 per copy plus \$1.00 for mailing. Back issues of TTB are also available (6 issues) at a cost of 50 cents each, plus 50 cents for mailing. If you order these, please order from Ellen Nicol, Rt. # Box #####, Anthony, FL 32617 and make checks payable to The Gopher Tortoise Council. I am not responsible for producing the Proceedings nor for mailing the originals as part of the membership. However, I have a small stock on hand for those who join and want the Proceedings after the initial mailing.

If you know of anyone who might be interested in literature on the GTC, please write Ellen who will send a sample TTB, a brochure and a dues envelope to any prospect.

Please keep watching your newspapers and magazines for any articles of interest to the membership and forward them to the editor. You will be given credit for doing so.

NOTE TO OTHER PUBLICATIONS: Material printed in THE TORTOISE BURROW may be reproduced in your publications, but credit to TTB and to the author will be much appreciated.

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FROM THE GRASS ROOTS. . .

As a result of my involvement and the high profile I keep, people with gopher tortoise problems call or write me. The following is a letter from a man in Boston who writes:

"Thank you for the copy of the newsletter. Although it does not mention care directly, I am sure it will be useful; after all, anything which gives information about the animal may be applied towards its care, directly or indirectly.

"This particular tortoise is a friend of mine. He follows me around the house during the summer, and lives in a telephone booth-sized enclosure in the winter which, this year at last, is controlled for heat, light and humidity. He has spent the previous four years before that with another owner, also of this climate, and survived winters without humidity control. His vet is a reptile specialist, and the turtle is pretty healthy if an active and inquisitive behavioral pattern is any judge. Although he doesn't have a burrow, he has some mazes which are tortoise width and tortoise height, rigged so he only gets caught occasionally (he frees himself as a general rule, but occasionally wedges himself in where I have to get him out after a few hours. (Since they don't seem to be able to go backwards very well, I wonder how often they come up against an obstacle and cannot get out of their own burrows?)

"In any case, I would be disappointed if there were not some information about care. After all, you folks are the experts on the particular animal. Don't you care for those guys living away from home? (There is no conclusive evidence he is from Florida.)"

I wrote Michael, who joined the GTC, and said essentially that we had no "care sheets" because we discourage harboring gophers as pets, especially in parts of the country other than the southeast where sometimes, even under the best of conditions in their native habitat, the tortoises don't make it. Because he already had the animal, I gave him what advice and/or suggestions I could based on my own experience.

Whenever possible, though many contacts, I strongly advise visitors to Florida to NOT remove gophers from the wild and try to make pets of them up north. Such a small percentage survive, and it is just one more predation on the animal, actually. I suppose the idea of a "free" tortoise is irresistible. Years ago we were given a long term captive gopher from the Boston area and it was in deplorable condition from having been fed almost totally "people" food by the owners who

felt they were doing their best with their pet by buying all the good groceries for it. Owners become anthropomorphically involved, trying to make a house pet of an animal that is better off in the wild. Bob Nicol remembers when Ross Allen used to sell baby gophers for \$1.00 each. I know of one purchased at the time which is thriving, but it is certainly the exception.

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STUDENT AWARD DEADLINE EXTENDED

The GTC annually presents a cash award to a student conducting research related to the gopher tortoise, its habitat, or its commensals. The deadline for recipient of the 1985 Award has been extended to MARCH 1. Thanks to a special contribution to this fund from GTC member organization, R.A.G.E. (Rattlesnake and Gopher Enthusiasts of San Antonio, FL), students may apply for an award of up to \$300.00 this year. We urge all faculty and staff members of the GTC to announce this opportunity to their students.

Guidelines for proposals are available from Dr. Harold Wahlquist, ### #####, Stone Mountain, GA 30088; Dr. Dale Jackson, The Nature Conservancy, ### ##### Avenue, Tallahassee, FL 32303, or your state GTC representative.

COMING IN FUTURE ISSUES...

“Tortoise Farmer Takes Life Slow” – a story from Alabama –

“Tick Infestations” By the editor –

A forthcoming article in the Ft. Lauderdale Sun-Sentinel on gophers and the GTC due for publication soon –

“Everything You Always Wanted to Know about Gophers”, a Florida cracker story

And any article or personal experience YOU care to share with us...

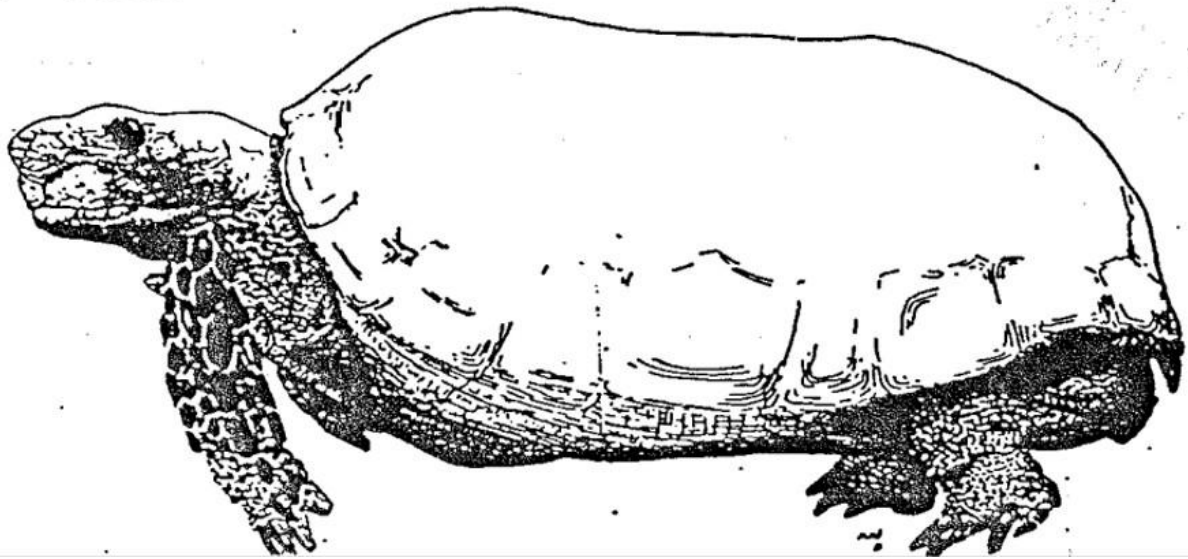


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