



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.

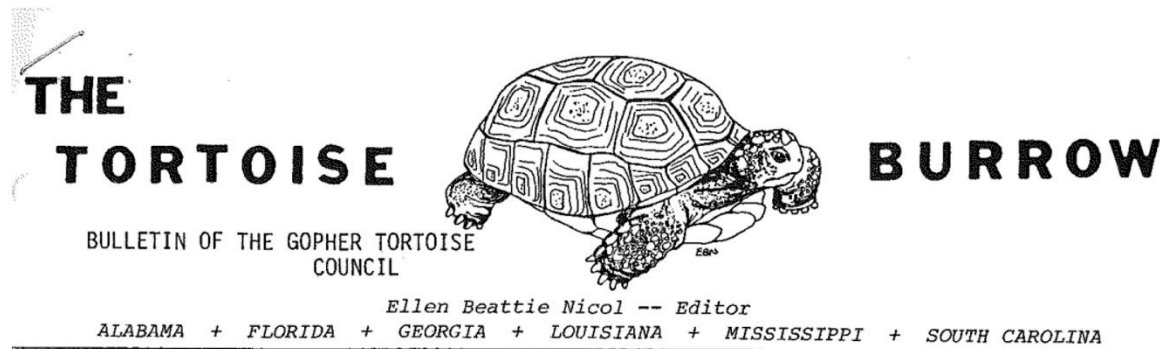


Image: Original artwork and letterhead for the newsletter of the Gopher Tortoise Council

RESPONSES TO RESOLUTIONS

The December 1984 issue of THE TORTOISE BURROW contained several Resolutions adopted at the 1984 G.T.C. Annual Meeting. Following is a summary of actions taken by, or responses received from, agencies and/or individuals to which the Resolutions were directed:

1. Resolution praising ALABAMA Conservation Commissioner Hodnett and Game and Fish Director Kelley. Receipt duly noted and appreciation expressed.
2. Col. Robert M. Brantly, Executive Director of the FLORIDA Game and Fresh Water Fish Commission, thanked the G.T.C. for its interest and noted that the Commission currently is evaluating several proposed rule changes concerning the harvest of gopher tortoises in Florida. If adopted, these changes would "Reduce gopher tortoise bag limit from five to two, and shorten the open season on gopher tortoise from six to three months (October, November and December) and prohibit interstate shipment of gophers." Continuing population declines necessitate a reduction of harvest. Prohibiting any shipment from the State will minimize commercial use."

These proposals have been published for public comment. Although steps in the right direction, I believe they are still inadequate in light of the tortoise's biology, and I will formally state this to the Commission in my capacity as Co-Chair of GTC. Others wishing to respond independently or desiring to examine the Commission report on which these proposals are based should contact me (904 224- 207). A Commission Rules Committee will make the final determination. DRJ

3. Resolution calling for increased emphasis on gopher tortoise conservation and education efforts by State of GEORGIA: letter from Mr. J. L. Ledbetter written for Mr. Leon Kirkland, Director of Game and Fish, states that (1) gopher is fully protected by Georgia law, but prior to 1982 enforcement received minimal emphasis (Thus, there seems to be no question that Louisiana and Florida are the only holdouts.); (2) beginning in 1982, enforcement efforts increased, resulting in "12 cases of warnings"; (3) enforcement is different because of local traditions; (4) Department 'will continue to educate the people and seek additional money...'; (5) Department has instituted long rotations with regular burning schedules on wildlife management areas and parks.

4. Resolution urging U.S. Forest Service to protect gophers in DeSoto National Forest: Forest Supervisor of National Forests in MISSISSIPPI has issued closure order on taking or molestation of gophers in DeSoto Nat. Forest, including banning introduction of gasoline into burrows.

5. Resolution supporting petition to U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to list western gopher populations as endangered: our Resolution, along with other materials received on subject, are under active consideration by U.S.F.W.S.

It is apparent that the most notable action to date relative to subjects addressed by our Resolutions is the Forest Service's closure order in Mississippi. Members are urged to write: Mr. B. F. Finison, Forest Supervisor, National Forests in Mississippi, ### #. ##### Street, Suite ####, Jackson, MS 39269, expressing appreciation. Expressions of appreciation are also due Mr. Lon Strong, Exec. Director, Dept. of Wildlife Conservation, Southport Mall, P.O. Box ###; Jackson, MS 39205. The State of Mississippi has officially concurred in Lohofener's and Lohmeier's contention that populations of Gophers in Mississippi are endangered and has worked with the Forest Service on the closure matter.

Despite some apparent progress, we still have problems in Georgia. Letters are needed to Mr. Leon Kirkland, with carbon copies to Governor Harris, encouraging gopher conservation in Georgia and pointing out that only a small fraction of the population persists in eating gophers,

but that in the case of the gophers, severe consequences can result from the actions of this very small group. Mr. Kirkland's address: Department of Natural Resources, Game and Fish Division, ### ##### Street SW, Atlanta, GA 30334

(Above material on Florida provided by Dr. Dale R. Jackson, and all other by Dr. Robert Mount, GTC Co-Chairmen)

PLEASE TAKE A MOMENT TO WRITE THESE IMPORTANT LETTERS !

.....

RATTLERS A HOT ITEM FOR LUNCH. But snakes getting scarce at roundup

Excerpts from story in Florida Times-Union, Jacksonville, Sunday, January 27, 1985 by Terry Dickson, Staff Writer, concerning the roundup in Georgia:

“Whigham, GA.-- There's no critical shortage yet, but Whigham's annual rattlesnake festival, in which folks receive dollars for diamondbacks apparently has put a dent in the rattlesnake population. The shortage is thought to have been created by this southwest Georgia community's 25 annual Rattlesnake Roundups. Some of the thousands of snakes captured during the roundups have been eaten Southern fried by the annual influx of more than 10,000 tourists who overrun Whigham's two-lane main street for the event.....John Lodge, a Whigham native, searched hundreds of gopher tortoise holes, favorite winter hibernation spots for rattle- snakes. Their methods are the classic ones employed by most hunters.

“They shove 14 to 18-foot sections of black plastic water pipe into the tortoise holes. They twist and poke the pipe into the very bottom of the hole, and then hold the open end to an ear and listen. If they hear buzzing rattlers, they pour a small amount of gasoline into the pipe. The end shoved into the hole is plugged with a shotgun shell casing, and holes are punched in the pipe for about a foot up its length. The hunter then blows into the pipe forcing gasoline fumes into the hole -- the snake exits and, ideally, is captured. Sometimes the snake will not budge -- other times, the exit is blocked by a gopher tortoise, and the snake can't get out. At times like that, the hunter digs the snake out. That can be a lot of work, since a gopher tortoise sometimes digs tunnels 20 feet long, four feet beneath the surface.”

.....

By Terry Reed Osterman, University of South Florida, Department of Biology, Tampa,
Florida 33620

Tortoises were weighed, measured, aged and marked for permanent identification. Four hundred eleven active or inactive burrows were marked and 127 tortoises were captured. Auffenberg and Franz would predict a density of 20.7 tortoises/ha, yet the actual density is 10.4 tortoises/ha. A more conservative estimate of tortoise density (when based on burrow counts) appears needed. Pre-reproductive animals (<13 yo) composed 65.4% of the population. The ratio of known males:females was 1:1. All adult females encountered between 1 April and 1 July were palpated for the presence of shelled eggs. Gravid females were radiographed and induced with Oxytocin (2 units/100g body mass) to lay their entire clutch. The average clutch size was 8.1 eggs (n = 10 females) and ranged from 5 – 10 eggs per female. There was no correlation between clutch size and female size (carapace length). One half of each clutch was frozen for future nutrient analyses; the other half was incubated for 91-105 days at 30°C. All hatchlings were frozen for future nutrient analyses. Thirteen hatchlings were produced from 46 eggs -- a hatchling success rate of 28.3%. Future studies concerning partitioning of nutrients to adult tortoise body compartments were discussed.

(Abstract of a talk presented in Gainesville, FL on 10 November 1984, at the Annual Meeting of the Gopher Tortoise Council.)

[illegible]

(From News/Sun-Sentinel, Ft. Lauderdale, FL. Sunday, January 6, 1985, by Staff Writer Jim Erickson:)

DEERFIELD BEACH -- It was an ideal afternoon for almost anything but hunting gopher tortoises. On cool days like Saturday, the cold-blooded diggers shun the sun and stay at home in the warmth of their burrows. For the 70 Boy Scouts and reptile lovers who had come to save the creatures from the bulldozer's blade, that meant a lot of extra sweat and toil.

"I know they're out there; the holes are there," Deerfield Beach City Forester Zeke Landis said as he surveyed about 70 acres of sandy, dry land scattered with slash pine and palmetto. "If it had been a warm day the turtles would have been out -- we could have got a dozen of 'em." Part of that vacant land -- south of Hillsboro Boulevard and just west of Interstate 95 -- will soon be leveled for a Publix frozen food warehouse and distribution center. Armed with spades, walkie-talkies and mirrors to reflect sunlight into the burrows, Landis and scouts from at least nine area troops scoured the property in search of the small circular holes indicating a gopher tortoise burrow.

After nearly four hours the hunters had captured four gopher tortoises, ranging in size from 6 to 12 inches in length. They will be released in parks and nature centers, such as the County's Fern Forest Nature Center in Deerfield Beach, Deerfield Island Park or North Lauderdale's new Hampton Pines Park. "Even if we got just one, it would have been worth it," Landis said. "Now we know that at least those four will survive." Landis said he hopes the scouts will return each weekend to continue the search, until construction begins.

With the intensity of treasure hunters searching for a chest of gold, the scouts shoveled frantically after the elusive tortoises, which live in burrows up to 10 feet long and 6 feet below the surface. With long claws on their flipper-like front legs, these reptiles can move quickly through the sandy soil to escape a pursuer. Some of the truly dedicated scouts dove into the holes head-first and grabbed for the shells while co-workers held their ankles.

"Unfortunately, the gopher tortoise prefers the same habitat as the human animal does -- high and dry -- so instead of grass to eat, they now have concrete," said Lisa Herbst, the Broward County naturalist who will relocate the creatures. During the last 100 years, 80 per cent of the tortoise habitat in Florida has been developed, and experts predict all the gopher tortoises in the state -- which has 80 per cent of the nation's tortoise population -- will disappear by the year 2025. Gopher tortoises have been designated a species of special concern, two steps away from endangered.

Assistant Scoutmaster Randy Inman of Pompano Beach said he was glad to lend a hand to save the tortoises and spend a sunny afternoon with his son and daughter away from "the concrete

[illegible]

The only way to save these strangest of condoites from airport expansion involves winning federal protection for the gopher tortoise as an endangered or threatened species.

What is probably Broward's oldest and certainly most unusual condominium may soon be razed so Fort Lauderdale can make more money from its airport. This condo sits amid 18 acres of scrub land on Fort Lauderdale Executive Airport's northern border. Built ages before developers first considered transplanting entire Brooklyn neighborhoods to South Florida, it offers no swimming pools, golf courses, game rooms or laundries. The residents are a dozen of the muscular, scaly-headed creatures that built it -- gopher tortoises -- reptiles that inhabit underground burrows 3 feet deep and 30 feet long. The burrows' amenities include dry soil, a plentiful food supply of native plants and a diverse mix of other species for neighbors. "It is really kind of a subterranean condominium," said Dale Jackson, a scientist interest in saving it. The only way to save these strangest of condoites from airport expansion involves winning federal protection for the gopher tortoise as an endangered or threatened species.

Such protection would require the Federal Aviation Administration, which has final authority over land use at the airport, to prohibit the city from taking the tortoises' turf. But by the time that is accomplished -- at least a year -- it may be too late. The city has commissioned a master plan on how to use the remaining available land at Executive Airport. The question seems to be when the city will use the land, not if it will. Environmentalists have succeeded in drawing some attention to the habitat, persuading a county advisory board to recommend that county commissioners try to buy it for a public park.

6

properties still waiting to be bought. "The open spaces are just disappearing, and there are so many rare and wonderful things in the environment now that they are worth appreciating," said Wilma Weidman, a member of Broward's Native Plant Society. "They're all threatened species, whether they're officially considered so or not."

IMPORTANT TO ECOSYSTEM

"I guess that's why there is a Florida Gopher Tortoise Council to protect the tortoise, because it so important to the ecosystem," said Jackson, co-chairman of the Tortoise Council. "In these dry habitats, the tortoise isn't the only animal that lives in a deep burrow. It serves as a refuge for other species as well. "Gopher frogs live in them, Florida mice spend most of their time in gopher tortoise habitats. [There are also] indigo snakes, pine snakes, rattlesnakes, 30 species of invertebrates, insects, spiders, dung beetles." If left alone, the habitat might survive indefinitely.

The tortoises forage extensively through the surrounding stand of rosemary shrub, perhaps the last of its kind In Broward. They feed on grass and plants, expelling the seeds in their waste. The seeds sprout new plants to replenish the tortoises' food supply. In the burrows, dung beetles feed on the excrement and are, in turn, fed upon by frogs and mice, which are eaten by the snakes. "It's a very Intricate food chain," said Jackson, a state zoologist who spends most of his free time with the Gopher Tortoise Council trying to save the reptile from extinction.

WORK PROVES FRUSTRATING

The work has proved frustrating for Jackson, as well as for Weidman, because the tortoise hasn't been left alone anywhere in its range, which stretches from South Florida into Central Georgia and the southernmost tip of South Carolina, across the bottom third of Alabama, southern Mississippi and eastern Louisiana. In Florida, tortoises can still be hunted at a rate of five per hunter per day in the season, which runs from July 1 to December 31. The Tortoise Council is lobbying the State's Game and Fresh Water Fish Commission for a moratorium on hunting. The tortoise population throughout its range has dwindled from an estimated 10 million at the turn of the century to 1 million today. The reptiles were killed for human consumption or when their pine forest habitat was cut for timber. The tortoise Is nearly extinct In Louisiana, and an estimated 10,000 remain in Mississippi and Alabama.

Concerned scientists have petitioned the U.S. Department of Interior's Fish and Wildlife Service to declare the gopher tortoise an endangered species, but only in the three states that make up its western range. The surviving tortoises thrive in North Florida and Georgia, making It an unlikely candidate for the endangered or threatened species list anytime soon, Jackson said.

AIRPORT LAND SQUEEZE

"We only have 32 acres of leaseable land up there now," said Phil Greene, assistant to the Fort Lauderdale city manager. "We have at least three firms that are interested in getting more land to build more hangars. "Since the airport was donated to the city by the FAA (after World War II), they insisted that it be used for aviation purposes, unless the city can say this land is no longer and never will be needed. "And, of course, we just couldn't say that."

[illegible]

FROM THE GRASS ROOTS...

A couple from Miami about a year ago, brought us two gophers that had been gnawed by dogs (both recovered), but the couple's parents, who lived in a town a little north of us, accompanied them when they brought us the injured tortoises. The parents said their dog loved to chew

tortoises, but just for fun, not even to eat them. Impatiently I said, "can't you discipline your dog and punish it for doing that?" The reply was "but the dog thinks it's fun, it's his game, and we don't want to take his fun away." No matter how much I tried to reason with them about saving the tortoises, it was clear that nothing would be changed and the dog would be allowed to have his "fun". These people simply see nothing wrong in destroying gophers for whatever reason.

E B N

+++++

We hear the World Future Society, true to its name, has taken stock of some recent forecasts and found little to cheer about, unless growing to be older than 100 is one's goal in life. The forecasts are considered by the 30,000-member, non-profit society as the most thought-provoking of those made by scientists, scholars and others who belong to the group. Among their predictions:

** While people grow older, animal and plant species may be disappearing at the rate of 10,000 a year by 1990, with one species becoming extinct each HOUR. The greatest threat is largely due to the destruction of tropical forests.

** Unless there is a drastic downturn in population growth, more people will be born in the year 2050 than were born in the 1,500 years after the birth of Christ.

** The fastest-growing country in the world is Kenya, adding 4.1 percent to its population each year. By 2020 there will be four times as many Kenyans as today. (Bad news for animals there.)

Gopher tortoises in the southeast could face the same fate unless more serious protection is accorded them.

FROM THE DESK OF THE SECRETARY/EDITOR:

We're grateful to Jim Bloom from Fort Lauderdale for sending along the articles used here from the Miami Herald and the Fort Lauderdale News/Sun-Sentinel. As always, please keep your eyes open for material that can be used in THE TORTOISE BURROW. We need to know what is going on in other states. You will be given credit for sending!

If you know of anyone at all (or agency) who would be interested in information on the GOPHER TORTOISE, send me the name and I'll send a copy of the latest TTB.

In case you don't have a dues envelope, here are the categories and amounts for membership in the GTC: \$5.00 student, \$10.00 regular, \$25.00 societies, clubs, groups, \$25.00 contributor (over and above the regular), and \$100.00 sustaining member. Seven back issues of THE TORTOISE BURROW are available at 50 cents each, plus 50 cents for mailing (\$4.00 for all). Bumper stickers are still available at \$1.00 each, plus 22 cents for mailing. We are considering having more T-shirts made with either the GTC logo or else a single tortoise. Please drop me a card if you are interested -- we need to know if there is a market for them. Also advise what design you would prefer.

If you are interested in purchasing stationery or note paper with a tortoise design by Ellen Nicol, please write for information. Your name and address can be printed on, at no extra charge in some cases. A percentage of the profit goes to benefit the GTC. (Also greeting cards with gopher tortoises are available.)

PLEASE NOTE: DO NOT USE the old prepaid GTC mailing envelopes. If you have any around, please destroy them. The postal service will not honor them when used, and they end up in some post office no-man's-land and your check disappears forever, usually.

OTHER PUBLICATIONS PLEASE NOTE Material printed in THE TORTOISE BURROW may be reproduced in your publication, but credit to TTB and to the source will be much appreciated.

+++++

Didn't make it in this issue, but coming in the future:

"Tortoise Farmer Takes Life Slow – a story from Alabama

"Tick Infestation" – By the editor

"Everything You Always Wanted to Know About Gophers" – A Florida cracker story.

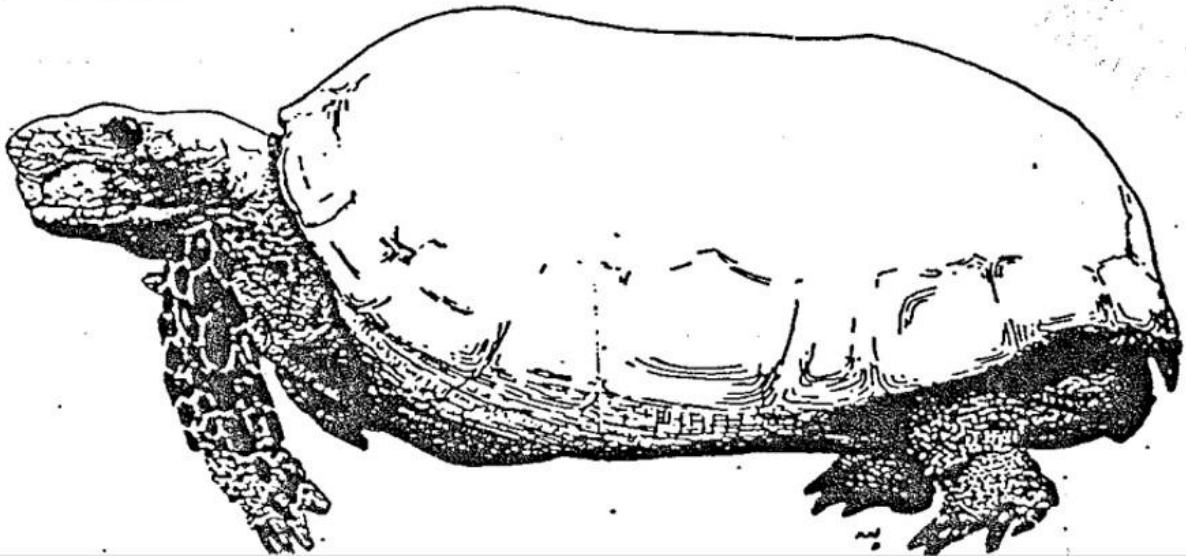


Image: Original artwork for the newsletter of the Gopher Tortoise Council.

This document was created and transcribed by Bradley O'Hanlon
Transcription assistance by Microsoft 365 Copilot
May 2026