



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.

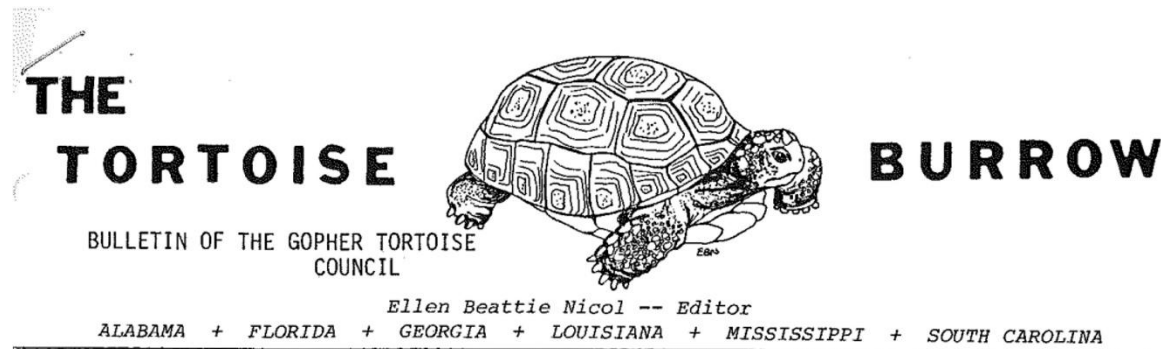


Image: Original artwork and letterhead for the newsletter of the Gopher Tortoise Council

From Ocala, Fl. STAR-BANNED 3/29/85

CITRA MAN ARRESTED FOR GOPHER HUNTING

"Gopher hunting, authorities say, is illegal during certain times of the year. A 37-year-old Citra man who went gopher hunting at the Dunnellon airport Thursday has been lodged in the county jail after allegedly trapping the prosaic creatures, which some consider a delicacy on the dinner table.

"According to the Marion County sheriff's office, Pernell Adkins was arrested and charged with taking gophers out of season after officers found he had snared 11 of them in their burrows. The hard-shelled animals are really land tortoises, but in Florida are commonly called gophers.

"Adkins was arrested on airport property after he allegedly trapped the animals out of season. Following his arrest, deputies learned Adkins was wanted on a warrant for failure to appear on another charge of taking gophers out of season on an earlier date."

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Letter to the Editor, Ocala STAR-BANNER 4/6/85

NEED FOR PROTECTING GOPHER TORTOISE EXISTS

"Newcomers to Ocala may wonder about the March 29 story of a man being jailed for trapping gopher tortoises. It is legal to hunt gophers in season, but trapping is illegal.

"These native reptiles were once very plentiful, but due to habitat destruction and human predation, whole areas are devoid of populations now. Many are killed by forest fires, disease and predation by other animals, especially dogs. Some are killed on highways or by farm equipment. Many eggs are dug up and eaten in the nest by raccoons and other animals, as are the infants that emerge if they escape being destroyed in the nest. Only 25 percent of the butchered tortoise is usable when killed for food; the rest wasted.

"Studies indicate that gopher tortoises require 10 to 15 years to reach maturity, produce only one clutch of 5 to 7 eggs per year, and reproduce successfully (i.e. to recruitment) only once every 9 or 10 years. A Gopher Tortoise Council, with headquarters at the University of Florida in Gainesville, was formed seven years ago by concerned biologists and individuals interested in conservation of these ancient creatures while there is still time. Their status is that of a Species of Special Concern due to decreasing numbers and rapid destruction of their native habitat forever by commercial interests.

"There has been a possession limit of five tortoises per person per day. The Florida Game and Fresh Water Fish Commission in its wisdom, and with encouragement from the GTC has now adopted in principle, new regulations that will be finalized in May, to be effective in July, cutting the six month open season to three months (October, November and December) and reduce the possession limit from five to two. The article in the STAR-BANNER reassures us that regulations are being enforced and violators will be prosecuted."

Ellen Nicol, Secretary
Gopher Tortoise Council

The full text of the rule (concerning gopher tortoises) is:

"The taking of turtles by shooting with firearms, bucket traps, or snares is prohibited. No person shall buy, sell, or possess for sale any gopher tortoise; (*Gopherus polyphemus*)nor shall any person possess more than two gopher tortoises. The pouring or placing of gasoline or other potentially toxic substances into the burrows of the gopher tortoises is prohibited.

"Gopher tortoises (*Gopherus polyphemus*) may be taken from October 1 through January 1 except in that portion of the state lying south of a line designated by State Road 72 to Arcadia and westward along State Road 70.* The use of traps or snares for taking gopher tortoises is prohibited."

(* Ed. note: there is no open season in this area, which is roughly the southern third of the peninsula - Lake Okeechobee and southward.)

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It is suggested that anyone seeing an item such as the first in this newsletter, write a somewhat similar letter to the local editor mainly as a means to educate those who may not be aware of the latest regulations as well as generally advise readers of the plight of the gopher tortoise, many of whom are totally unaware or uninterested.

The Gopher Tortoise Council is most appreciative of the new Florida regulations and it is hoped that enforcement will result in a decrease in human predation.

MEANWHILE...

Dr. Dale R. Jackson, a GTC co-chairman, provides the following items:

FEDERAL REVIEW UPDATE

"The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service officially announced in the December 18, 1984 Federal Register that four petitions to list five animals as Endangered presented substantial information that such listings may be warranted; status reviews have been initiated for all five. The species include the woodland caribou, Coeur d'Alene salamander, gopher tortoise (western populations), and two species of Texas tiger beetles."

CALL FOR INFORMATION ON ENDANGERED SPECIES IMPACTS
FROM PESTICIDES

"Under contract to the President's Council on Environmental Quality, the Center for Environmental Education (CEE) is reviewing the Environmental Protection Agency's compliance with the Endangered Species Act, particularly with respect to its implementation of the Federal Insecticide, Fungicide, and Rodenticide Act. (FIFRA). As part of the review, CEE is seeking information concerning the injury or death of Endangered or Threatened animals or plants in connection with the use of chemicals controlled by FIFRA. Individuals with information concerning such incidences, or who are otherwise interested in this review, are urged to write Roger E. McManus, Executive Director, Center for Environmental Education, ### #th Street, N.W. ; Washington, D.C. 20001."

(Although the gopher tortoise is not federally listed, CEE would welcome any such data pertinent to it or its associates. DRJ)

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FROM GEORGIA...

State Representative, Dr. Harold Wahlquist advises:

CHICKADEE CHECK-OFF FILES

"The Chickadee Check-off", also known to humans as the Nongame Species Voluntary Tax Refund Check-off Bill, easily passed the Georgia General Assembly in February. HB495 guarantees that Georgians will have the opportunity to donate part of their state tax refunds or to make an extra gift to programs that protect and promote the viability of Georgia's nongame species. The check-off system, operational in a majority of states, will be in place by tax year 1989, or sooner if possible. Meanwhile, Georgia officials are setting up a nongame conservation phase-in fund which will allow DNR to solicit direct contributions to the fund. Governor Harris has suggested providing \$100,000 - \$200,00 seed money as a challenge fund for Georgians to match. These funds will continue state nongame projects until the check-off is implemented. A campaign is being developed to promote the check-off and nongame programs. The tax refund check-off is expected to generate \$600,000 annually.

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GTC STUDENT AWARD NEWS

GTC Student Award Committee Coordinator, Dr. Harold Wahlquist, announces that John E. Marshall, of the University of South Alabama, and Russell Burke, of the University of Florida, are co-recipients of the Gopher Tortoise Council's 1985 Student Award. John Marshall will be performing research on the effects of nest predation on hatchling success in the gopher tortoise, and Russell Burke's research will be on electrophoretic analysis of genetic differences between disjunct gopher populations. Each student is to receive half of the \$300. award.

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ENVIRONMENTAL AWARENESS DAY

On March 18, GTC members Janet Floyd and Ellen Nicol spent most of the day at the Marion County Public Library for the first annual Environmental Awareness Day. Represented were the Florida Audubon Society's Center for Birds of Prey, Save the Osprey, and the Gopher Tortoise Council. Exhibited was a live pine gopher snake provided by the Silver Springs Attraction, and Florida State Museum displays included stuffed animals native to the area such as a barn owl, bobcat and a Florida panther. One of the more popular attractions was Resee Collins and John Giles, curators at the Florida Audubon Society's Center for Birds of Prey in Maitland, who showed four of the birds in a display on the library lawn.

A mature male Southern Bald Eagle named "Stranger" had his left wing tip severed by a gunshot wound, making him incapable of flight. A member of the osprey family was also shown by Giles. He explained to the groups of students, who arrived by busloads all day from the local schools, that the osprey was hit by a car, damaging one of its eyes and was unable to take care of itself.

Giles also showed a screech owl and a kestrel -- a type of small falcon -- both of which had been raised in captivity as pets and could not be kept any longer.

The Center, which opened in 1979 near Orlando, is dedicated to rehabilitating injured birds of prey, but also has an educational program to inform the public about the birds which include eagles, hawks, owls, falcons, vultures and ospreys, their lifestyles and how they are affected by today's environment.

Ellen Nicol displayed two baby gophers that hatched last September, and the school children were intrigued. Ellen also brought a photograph album containing snapshots of adult, juvenile and baby gopher tortoises. Many children were familiar with the tortoise, and a few advised that "daddy brings them home and cooks them." Janet Floyd had printed a simple brief explanation sheet for the children to read, and some GTC literature was given out. A second Awareness Day is planned for next spring, when preparations will be made for more literature to be provided, more photos, perhaps posters and also a few adult live tortoises. All involved with the Day were convinced that education of the children to the plight of the animals is vital to their preservation.

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GTC member Janet Floyd has a home in Ocala National Forest, and maintains an assortment of household pets including several water turtles and a few gopher tortoises living free in burrows on her land. When the recent fires came to within a quarter of a mile of her home, she was told to evacuate. She packed up as many animals as would fit in her station wagon and headed for friends' homes to harbor them until the crisis passed or her place was leveled. Before leaving, she made an attempt to see if the gophers were safe in their burrows. Her home and yard were spared, and once her domestic animals were safely returned to their quarters, she went to check on the gophers. Bulldozers had dug trenches to try to contain the fire, and one tore up the entrance to at least three burrows in a field behind her home. For days afterwards, she checked the area for signs of the tortoises, and spent a lot of time probing for the tunnels. The landscape had been so altered that she could not locate them. Weeks later she says she has not seen a sign of the gophers, although this does not mean they were destroyed. Some others nearby whose burrows were not trenched are out and foraging.

Several months ago in another forest fire incident, someone called who knew of my work with gophers. They had watched a fire behind their home, and observed a large tortoise heading for its burrow to escape the heat. However, the fire storm caught it when it was within two feet of the burrow mouth and literally barbecued it. When we saw the tortoise it was in deep shock, scales and skin stiff and peeling from the front legs, the eyes burned closed, and laminae popped off from the heat. They wanted us to try to do something for the animal, but we knew it was terminal. It died about an hour later, a blessing.

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MORE ON FIRES...

EVERGLADES FIRE WILL BE BENEFICIAL
SAYS BIOLOGIST

"Miami (AP) 5/22/85 -- There's a silver lining to the clouds that produced lightning and recently set fire to several thousand acres of South Florida's Everglades, a state biologist says. Fertile ash from the fire rejuvenates the glades and grasslands, creating a safer, healthier environment for wildlife, explained Bob Progulske, biologist with the Florida Game and Fresh Water Fish Commission. In less than two weeks, he says, tender green shoots will replace the dry grasses that fueled the blazes.

"Pretty soon you'll see deer grazing where once there was just ash," he said. The game and freshwater fish commission tries to burn about 50,000 acres annually in conservation areas in Palm Beach, Broward and Dade counties, but recent strong winds and dry conditions have made controlled fires impossible. "We have to look at this fire as a bonus. It saved us a little work," said Progulske.

"Recent wildfires have burned nearly 9,000 acres of Everglades conservation land in the three South Florida counties. Although wildlife experts have been unable to determine exactly how many animals and birds died in the blazes, they say losses probably are smaller than anticipated.

Larger animals, such as deer and panthers, retreat to water and marsh. Alligators cool off in canals. Turtles, frogs, snakes and other amphibians and reptiles bury themselves in mud until flames pass by. Progulske says small mammals suffer the most."

(Ed. note: Tortoises are probably safe if the fire is not so fast-moving that it beats them to their burrows.)

FROM THE GRASS ROOTS

By Ellen Nicol

TICK INFESTATIONS

One of the chores involved in the captive care of tortoises is removing ticks (*Amblyomma tuberculatum*). When a tortoise emerges from its burrow, ticks can be seen engorged with blood on one or more parts of the animal. From one 28 cm female that had been injured during a predator attack, I removed 13 ticks, ranging in length from 5 mm to 18 mm, and I have seen one on another tortoise that measured 25 mm! Ticks attach themselves to the soft parts of the axillary, inguinal and neck cavities, the cloacal area and sometimes between the toes.

It is convenient to bring the tortoise in the house, to the stainless steel kitchen sink where there is a water supply (tortoises usually eliminate copiously during the struggle). It takes some doing to get them to relax sufficiently to allow grasp of the strong legs. A finger trapped between legs and body can be painfully pinched. I have a large tweezers with which I grasp the tick firmly, after first applying mineral spirits or oil to weaken the parasite. The tick should be withdrawn slowly so that it can be removed intact, without the mouth parts being broken off and left in the tortoise, as infection may occur at the site. This is difficult to accomplish in some cases.

Most scientists feel that ectoparasites such as *Amblyomma* do little or no harm to their hosts, as a natural symbiosis has evolved between the two species. If the ticks were to injure the tortoises to the point where the hosts' lives were endangered, the ticks would lose their source of nourishment. Knowing that, it is probably not necessary to remove the ticks, but the idea of those blood suckers attached to a tortoise is, if nothing else, anthropomorphically disturbing, so I shall continue to remove them.

(Many thanks to DRJ for critique of this material ... EN)

SOME GENERAL HEALTH HINTS

Some folks keep gopher tortoises as back yard pets or have some living wild near their homes. A gopher, if fed by humans, will eventually tame to the point where it will not scoot back to its burrow immediately. In fact, it will learn to eat food offered by a human from the hand. An ear of corn works very well, and tortoises love it -- cob and all sometimes. The best food for the tortoise is still its native grasses, unpalatable as they may appear to us, but treats of zucchini or other squashes, apples, occasional banana, pineapple, strawberries, broccoli (leaves especially are good), tomatoes, cooked sweet potato are relished. Lettuce, which is often offered, is virtually worthless and should not be fed to tortoises. The high water content puts a strain on the kidneys to eliminate (same for tomatoes or other "high fluid" foods). Be certain to wash any fruits and vegetables to remove any trace of pesticide. Some tortoises will even eat meat!

A gopher may not drink from a pan of water, but if you allow water from a hose to "puddle", it will often drink its fill -- sometimes for long periods. They will sometimes come out in the rain and drink water as it runs from their carapace. A tortoise should ALWAYS have shelter from the sun if it does not have its own burrow. Never put a tortoise where it can't escape the sun. Lethal body temperatures are quickly reached. Be especially alert for this if you are harboring two males, as one may tip over the other, it may be unable to right itself and will die in the sun, although most of the time they do right themselves -- occasionally with a nudge from the make who has done the tipping!

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FROM THE BUISNESS OFFICE . . .

OTHER PUBLICATIONS PLEASE NOTE: Material printed in TTB may be reproduced, but credit to the source will be appreciated. It is requested that you do print the new Florida regulations as outlined on page 1 and 2 of this paper. Visitors to Florida are still removing tortoises to their home state, and it is my understanding that young gophers are being sold in pet shops up north. Gopher tortoises simply do not live (in about 98% of the cases) once removed from their native habitat, and it is wrong to take them. If you see gophers for sale in stores, you may wish to contact your state's wildlife regulation office to see if they have a reciprocal agreement with Florida to prosecute the store's owner who is selling them. Some states do. *Gopherus polyphemus* is a protected reptile in Florida and violators can be fined. For the average turtle collector, they don't make the best pets -- they are large, are subject to bacterial infections to which they have no immunity, and their diminishing numbers should preclude anyone taking them just because they are "free" and walking around just waiting to be picked up. They probably have a burrow nearby. Give our gophers a break, and leave them be. Please pass on the word in your papers.

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GOPHER TORTOISE COUNCIL TEE-SHIRTS NOW AVAILABLE: Small, medium, large or extra large; light blue, tan and yellow. With GTC logo (circle with side view of burrow, with commensals) 100% cotton. Send check for \$6.50 made out to Dr. Robert Mount, Dept. of Zoology-Entomology, Auburn University, Auburn, AL 36849. You may want to order one size larger than usual for possible shrinkage. Proceeds go to benefit the Council.

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DUES -- Our dues system is geared to year-end expiration, regardless of when you joined. It is now June. New members may pay half year dues (\$5.00) and receive publications from now to end of year, when full dues will be needed. If you want to join now, and pay \$10.00 (or full membership) you will receive back issues for 1985, for the complete set. There has also been some confusion in the past about dues being paid twice (some pay at annual meeting and then send another check in spring). Dues paid at meeting are for THE COMING YEAR. Of course, if you want to contribute twice, we'll appreciate it!

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You will note in this issue that we have material only from the states of Florida and Georgia and too much written by the editor. Without input from other states and individuals this situation will get worse before it gets better. So, come on everyone, send me some notes on your gopher experiences and I'll put them into articles. How about news from the four other states? How about it representatives?

HAVE A GOOD SUMMER. . . .AND KEEP COOL

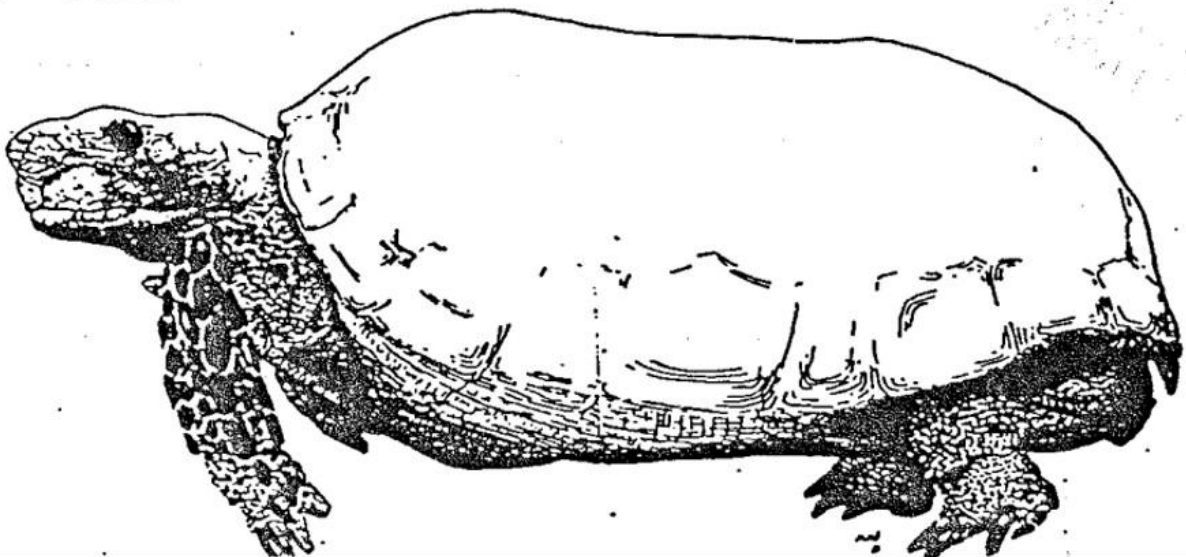


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