



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.

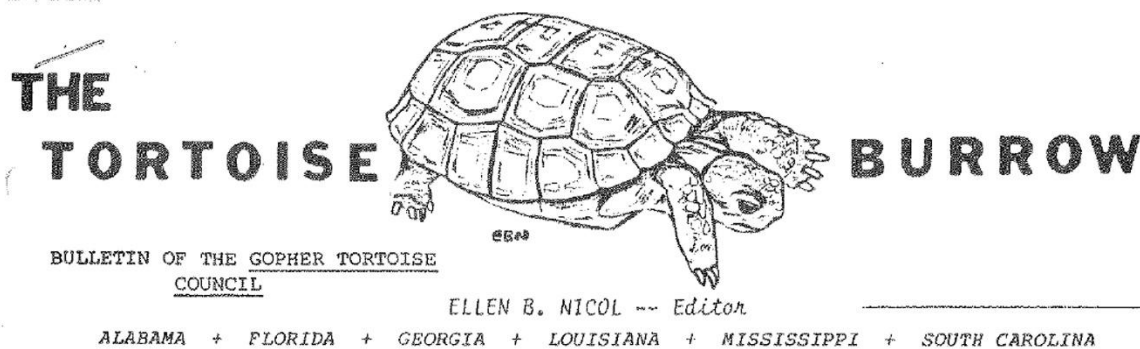


Image: Original artwork and letterhead for the newsletter of the Gopher Tortoise Council

1985 ANNUAL GOPHER TORTOISE COUNCIL MEETING ISSUE 1985

Solon Dixon Forestry Center (of Auburn University)

Dixie, Alabama

November 15-17

Solon Dixon Forestry Center is situated in extreme southern Alabama, roughly halfway between Andalusia and Brewton, immediately to the north of U.S. Highway 29. A conspicuous sign on the highway marks its location. Gopher tortoises occur in the area, and a variety of forestry practices have been employed on the sandhill forest types thereabouts. The results of some of these practices will be seen and explained on the Sunday field trip.

This year's annual meeting will focus chiefly on the effects of various management strategies on the sandhill or longleaf pine-turkey oak forest association, especially as they relate

to the welfare of the gopher tortoise and its traditional associates. This forest type is that in which gopher tortoises are most frequently encountered in a vast majority of the species' range. The welfare of the other native plants and animals of the sandhill ecosystem will be considered, as will aspects of management practicability. The format of the main Saturday session is informal and audience participation will be encouraged.

MEETING AGENDA

Friday, November 15

3:00 - 5: pm	Registration
5:00 - 7:30 pm	Social
7:30 pm	Dinner
9:30 pm	Informal Discussions

Saturday, November 16

7:00 - 8:30 am	Breakfast
8:00 - 9:00	Registration
9:00 - 11:20 am	Speakers -- Laurie Ann Macdonald, Steve Godley, Dr. D. Bruce Means and State Reports
12:00 noon	Lunch and presentation of Gopher Tortoise Award, Dr. Dale Jackson
1:15 pm	Speakers -- Dr. George Folkerts
2:00 pm	Open panel-discussion on management strategies, with audience Participation, Moderator: Dick Franz, and Panelists: Joan Diemer, Dr. George Folkerts, Larry Hendrick, Dr. Ren Lohofener, Larry Landers, Dr. D. Bruce Means, Dr. Henry Mushinsky, Dr. Dan Speake.
3:15 pm	Break
3:45 pm	Continuation of Panel-discussion
4:45 - 5:15 pm	Business Meeting, Dr. Dale Jackson, presiding
5:15 pm	Informal Discussions
7:00 pm	Dinner

Sunday, November 17

7:00 - 8:30 am	Breakfast
9:00 - 11:30 am	Field trip
11:30 am	Adjourn

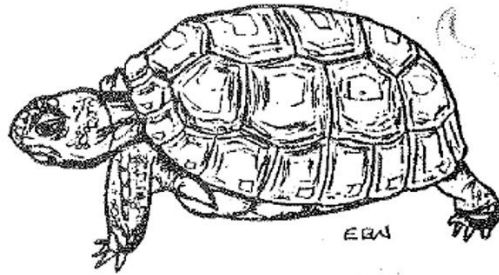


Image: Original artwork for The Tortoise Burrow by Ellen B. Nicol

1985 Meeting Pre-registration and Reservations

Because of the special rate being extended to conference participants, reservations for meals and lodging will be necessary. Please send the completed form (printed later in this publication) to Dr. Robert Mount, Department of Zoology-Entomology, Auburn University, AL 36849 or call Bob or Yula, his secretary, at (###) ###-#### BEFORE NOVEMBER 10 Pre-registration is \$8.00 regular, and \$5.00 student, which will be \$10.00 and \$7.00 at the door. Meals and lodging at Solon Dixon Center facilities from Friday afternoon to Sunday morning will be \$35.00. (This is for MEALS and LODGING!) Lodging consists of dormitory-style bunk beds. Linens and soap are furnished, but conferees should bring a blanket. (Sexes segregated.) Campsites are available for a nominal fee at open pond recreation area, Conecuh National Forest, ca. 15 miles to the southeast. SEE PAGE SEVEN (7) for a clip-and-mail form to be returned to Bob Mount, address above.

FOR THOSE WHO JOINED US LATELY, THE GOPHER TORTOISE COUNCIL WAS FOUNDED IN 1978 AS A RESULT OF CONCERN OVER THE CONTINUING DECLINE OF THE GOPHER TORTOISE, ITS HABITATS, AND MANT OF ITS PLANT AND ANIMAL ASSOCIATES. COUNCIL MEMBERS WORK WITH PUBLIC AGENCIES, PRIVATE LANDOWNERS, AND CONCERNED CITIZENS IN ATTEMPTING TO REVERSE THE DECLINES.

FLORIDA IS GETTING THERE

As most GTC members know, Florida is the only state in the remaining range of the gopher tortoise that still allows legal harvest of tortoises. Following last year's annual meeting, the GTC petitioned the Florida Game and Fresh Water Fish Commission (FGFWFC) to ban this practice totally, and, although we did not receive everything we wanted, substantial reductions have been made. I would like to share here a letter that I (Co-chair DRJ) received recently from Col. Robert M. Brantley, Executive Director of the FGFWFC, in which he summarizes the Commission's concerns for tortoises and some of the progressive changes it has instituted in the last year.

“Dear Dr. Jackson:

Thank you for your recent comments regarding the proposed amendments to the gopher tortoise harvest regulations.

Over the last two years, the Florida Game and Fresh Water Fish Commission has effected a 60-70 percent reduction in both the tortoise possession limit and season (limit from 5 to 2, season from 6 to 3 months -- ed.). The use of bucket traps and snares has been banned, and that portion of the state south of SR 70 has been closed to tortoise harvest. I believe the ongoing tortoise status surveys, population dynamics studies, relocation policy statement and ban on tortoise races after 1985 further reflect the Commission's interest in and concern for this species.

Although the 1985 regulation changes represent a sizable and currently appropriate reduction of potential tortoise harvest, the Commission remains flexible regarding future tortoise regulations. Critical questions involving past and present harvest impacts, juvenile tortoise survival, and tortoise response to population or habitat disturbance are being addressed. As additional data become available, the Commission will evaluate further modifications of the regulations and implement them as deemed necessary.

Thank you for your interest in the gopher tortoise.

Sincerely,
Colonel Robert M. Brantley
Executive Director ”

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MISSISSIPPI NATIONAL FORESTS BAN HARVEST OF TORTOISE

"One of the primary threats to gopher tortoise (*Gopherus polyphemus*) populations is the taking of individuals for food, sale and pets. The loss of mature gopher tortoises is magnified by the length of time required by the species to reach maturity and by their low reproductive rate. This loss is particularly significant in Mississippi, where the remaining limited habitat is fragmented. Recently, the supervisor of the national forests in Mississippi signed an order prohibiting the hunting and possession of the gopher tortoise, a Category 2 listing candidate, and the hunting of any wildlife species by the practice of "gassing" or the introduction of chemicals into burrows. Violation of this order is punishable by fine and/or imprisonment.

"The executive director of the Mississippi Department of Wildlife Conservation wrote a letter of support, stating that the order would facilitate their efforts to control poaching, and offering the assistance of State officers in controlling illegal take of gopher tortoises."

(From ENDANGERED SPECIES TECHNICAL BULLETIN, Vol. X, No. 6 (1985:11.)

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U.S. FOREST SERVICE SELECTS GOPHER TORTOISE AS INDICATOR SPECIES

Some of the best remaining populations of gopher tortoises live in the national forests of the Southeast (e.g., Florida's Ocala NF and Mississippi's DeSoto NF). The survival of these tortoise populations is directly dependent upon the management of their habitats by the Forest Service and the Service's recognition of the tortoise as an important keystone species.

In compliance with federal legislation, the U.S. Forest Service in each state recently prepared long-range (50+ years) land and resource management plans for its national forests. In recognition of its ecological importance in native longleaf pine habitats, the Forest Service in Florida proposed the gopher tortoise as one of ten "indicator species." This is good news because one of the stated goals in the plan is to "manage wildlife habitat to provide a diversity of habitats that will support high populations of all management indicator species." The Service proposes to monitor tortoise populations every five years to be sure that this goal is met.

Although the Forest Service's commitment to this goal remains to be seen, the signs are encouraging. In response to the Service on behalf of the GTC, I applauded its state goal, but also encouraged further actions, including designating specific sites as "sandhill preserves" and

banning the harvesting of tortoises on U.S. Forest lands. A copy of my response is available upon request.

DRJ

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A MESSAGE FROM THE CO-CHAIR

Because this is the last issue of THE TORTOISE BURROW that will appear before I step down as GTC Co-chairman, I wish to take this opportunity to share some thoughts with GTC members. When first asked if I would consider chairing the GTC, I knew that I would never have sufficient time to commit to do the job right, and I reluctantly declined. The following year, knowing that I had even less time to spare, I nonetheless acceded to a similar request from then-chairman, Peter Pritchard, for I felt that if I could not increase my level of commitment, it would be unfair to expect others to do so. Like most persons who work in the environmental movement, I am never completely satisfied with the results of our efforts, and it is easy to become frustrated at times. However, as I look back and try to jot down some of our collective accomplishments toward protecting the gopher tortoise and its habitat in the last two to three years, I am pleasantly surprised by the length and breadth of the list. As these are your accomplishments, too, I would like to review a few of them for you.

Concern for the gopher tortoise and the natural communities it represents is now being expressed at all levels. The tortoise is under consideration for federal protection throughout its range, and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is on the verge of proposing the western population as a threatened species. The U.S. Forest Service has selected the tortoise as an "indicator" of the health of certain southeastern national forests, and at least one U.S. forest (DeSoto, MS) has banned the harvest of tortoises. One of the largest holders of tortoise habitat in the Southeast, Eglin Air Force Base in western Florida, has announced similar intentions.

Similar expressions of concern have mounted at the state level. The tortoise is legally protected in the five states in which viable populations are believed to occur, and even Florida -- the only state that still allows a limited harvest -- has severely restricted (thought not yet sufficiently) the take of tortoises. New nongame wildlife programs, which emphasize public education and protection of a state's native biota, have just begun in Florida, Alabama and Georgia. Those of us in each of those states should work to assure that such programs focus part of their efforts on the tortoise and its ecosystem.

Land acquisition programs, both public and private, have protected substantial amounts of tortoise habitat in the last two years. The Nature Conservancy alone (for whom I work) has protected at least 12 sites known to harbor tortoise populations. In the coming year, I plan to direct my efforts, with the help of GTC members and others, toward establishing a comprehensive database of known tortoise occurrences, so that we can direct such programs toward protecting the best remaining tortoise habitats while there is still time. As a pioneer of the land conservation movement, George B. Fell recently said, "Almost nobody before us had seen the need or been able to set aside natural areas. And those that follow will no longer have the chance. They will only be able to care for what we leave them."

Your support of the Gopher Tortoise Council has been vital in the past, and it will be even more so in the future. I hope that you will continue and even increase your support and efforts on behalf of the Council and will educate others to do likewise.

As I write this, I am now editing the 1984 annual GTC Proceedings. Having reviewed the first four volumes, I am astounded at the amount of information we have learned about the tortoise and its associates. With this as background, and as environmental insults continue to mount, it becomes imperative that we work to apply this knowledge for the benefit of these species. For this reason, the 1985 GTC meeting will explore what we must do to manage the principal habitats of the tortoise. The discussions should be illuminating and, I suspect, especially lively. I very much hope to see you there.

Dale R. Jackson
Co-chairman, 1984-1985

GOPHER TORTOISE WORKSHOP HELD IN TAMPA

In conjunction with the annual meetings of the Society for the Study of Amphibians and Reptiles (SSAR) and the Herpetologists' League (HL), hosted August 4-9 by the University of South Florida, the GTC co-sponsored with the SSAR a workshop on the status of *Gopherus polyphemus*. At least 75 persons attended the workshop, which served both to introduce non-GTC members to the plight of the tortoise and to update GTC members on recent events. Speakers included Dick Franz (chairman, introduction), Larry Landers (ecology), Terry Osterman (reproductive biology), Joan Diemer (FL status and research), Ken Dodd (federal listing), and Dale Jackson (future needs). Two GTC student award recipients, Laurie Macdonald and Terry Osterman, led participants on a brief tour of their gopher tortoise study area adjacent to the USF campus.

During the tour, Joan Diemer earned the first GTC Self-Sacrifice Award for nobly protecting former co-chairman Peter Pritchard and others from the intestinal propellant of a large, adult gopher!

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U.S. FISH & WILDLIFE SERVICE FINDING ON THE PENDING PETITION TO LIST THE WESTERN POPULATION OF THE GOPHER TORTOISE (*GOPHERUS POLYPHEMUS*) AS ENDANGERED.

The Service was petitioned July 17, 1984 by Dr. Ren Lohofener and Dr. Lynn Lohmeier to list the western population of the gopher tortoise (*Gopherus polyphemus*) as endangered. The petition was accepted as an action that may be warranted with a 90-day finding made on September 7, 1984, and reported in the Federal Register for December 12, 1984 (49 FR 49118). Region 4 has recommended that the Service make a 12-month finding that listing is warranted, but that the best scientific and commercial information available indicates threatened, rather than endangered, status is more appropriate. A threatened species is one which is likely to become endangered within the foreseeable future. A draft proposed rule to list the western population of *Gopherus polyphemus* as threatened has been submitted by the Regional Office and is in stages of Washington Office approval.

FINDING: Listing as requested by this petition is warranted by information available at this time. The finding will be published promptly in the Federal Register. An immediate proposed rule to implement the requested action is precluded by pending proposals to add other species to the Lists of Endangered and Threatened Wildlife and Plants. Expeditious progress in listing precludes an immediate proposed rule and will be summarized in the Federal Register. The Petitioner will be notified and provided with a copy of the published finding.

Further inquires should be made to: Mr. Dennis B. Jordan, Field Supervisor

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

Endangered Species

Jackson Mall Office Center

Avenue, Suite

Jackson, Mississippe 39213

(###-###-####)

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SOUTH CAROLINA REPORT

South Carolina has an estimated 2,400 acres of gopher tortoise habitat. Nearly all of this is on the Tillman Sandridge in Jasper County. Population estimates based on line transect data indicate a steady decline over the past 6 years. One possible explanation is that none of the areas have been burned in the last six years. Highway mortality and some removal of "gophers" by people wanting to put them on their land may have also contributed to this decline.

There is some good news. The Nature Conservancy has acquired a donation of about 500 acres of gopher tortoise habitat from Georgia Pacific. This area contains our best population. Before donating the property to The Nature Conservancy, Georgia Pacific cut the higher grade timber and left scattered, small pines. This past winter we burned most of the area and plan to burn the remaining habitat this winter. In summary, the site is better for gophers than it has been in a while, and the site will continue to be managed as a preserve for gopher tortoises.

Down the road a couple of miles, there is some different news. The S.C. Public Service Authority, commonly known as Santee Cooper, bought a 1,000 acre tract which has about 800 acres of habitat and is our second best tortoise site. They plan to build a coal-fired power plant on this site. Construction of the plant would eliminate one third of our state's habitat. State biologists believe that a loss of this much habitat could ultimately mean extirpation of the gopher tortoise from South Carolina. Santee Cooper contends that South Carolina can lose that much habitat and still insure survival of the species. Negotiations are in the early stages. We hope the final outcome will keep us in "gophers".

(Above report by James A. Sorrow, South Carolina GTC State Representative and Wildlife Biologist, Nongame and Heritage Trust, South Carolina Wildlife and Marine Resources Department, Columbia, S.C.)

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FROM THE GRASS ROOTS:

It comes as a surprise to those of us who take scientific names for granted. Lately I have had several people ask me the origin of the name "gopher tortoise". Most assume it is because of their habit of burrowing in the ground, as apparently the furred land animal known up north as a "gopher" does. I explain "gopher" comes from the scientific name, *Gopherus polyphemus*, (the first name being the genus and the second, the species). This explanation satisfies some who

inquire, but clearly not all. I always give them my little pitch to ask their help in protecting the tortoise, and load them up with TTBs and the brown brochure so they can read about the situation.

Education is important, especially to the younger people who would otherwise tend to carry on the tradition of their parents that gophers are worthless, nuisance animals meant only to be destroyed. Remember that I am always glad to send material to any interested parties who are curious about gophers. Just drop me a card with the name and address and I'll take it from there.

Also ...

This is the first summer in the ten I have been living in Florida that I have not seen one gopher tortoise along the highway, walking in our pastures or dead on the road. Is it because of the wet summer weather, a diminution of tortoise populations or some unrelated reason? I wonder.

EBN

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NEWS FROM THE WEST

The desert tortoise (*Gopherus agassizii*), a relative of the gopher tortoise native to parts of the Mojave and Sonoran Deserts (California, Utah, Nevada, Arizona and New Mexico), faces many problems comparable to our southeastern species. A petition by three national conservation organizations (Defenders of Wildlife, Natural Resources Defense Council, and Environmental Defense Fund) to list the desert tortoise as endangered throughout its U.S. range is due to be acted on by September 14 by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. As 70% of desert tortoise habitat in the U.S. is federally owned (mostly under the jurisdiction of the Bureau of Land Management), federal listing of the tortoise would likely have a very positive effect on the species' survival prospects.

DRJ

NOTICE OF STUDENT AWARD – 1986

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 \$200. is available (per award, if more than one is selected) for the 1986 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 three or four pages (typed, double space), and should include a brief biographical 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. Harold Wahlquist, #### ####### Road, Stone Mountain, GA. 30088, who is the Chairman of the Review Committee to study proposals for the scholarship award no later than March 15, 1986. The Council will announce the recipient of the award at its annual meeting in fall 1986.

CLIP-AND-MAIL PRE-REGISTRATION AND RESERVATION FORM

See Page 2 for details...

Date: _____

NAME(S) _____

Address(es) _____

_____ Pre-registration (\$8.00 Reg., \$5.00 Student)

(Registration at door: \$10.00 and \$7.00)

_____ Meals and lodging at Center, Fri. pm – Sun. am (\$35.00)

_____ Meals only (check which meals):

Fri. pm (\$10.00) _____ Sat. am (\$5.00) _____ Sat. noon (\$10.00) _____

Sat. pm (\$10.00) _____ Sun. am (\$5.00) _____ TOTAL ENCLOSED _____

Make check payable to GOPHER TORTOISE COUNCIL, please. BEFORE NOVEMBER 10

COUNCIL BUISNESS MATTERS...

... ELECTIONS: Elections for the year 1986 will be held at the meeting. Nominations Chairwoman, Bette Bechtel, lists the following nominees for consideration: Dr. Robert Mount will continue in his second year as co-chairman; Dr. Dale Jackson, whose second term expires, to be succeeded by Terry R. Osterman; Dr. Robert Taylor, Treasurer, and Ellen Nicol, Secretary and Editor. Nominations will also be received from the floor.

... TEE SHIRTS: Bob Mount will have a supply of GTC tee shirts at the meeting for sale. Shirts may also be ordered by mail for \$6.50, including postage, from Bob at his address on page two. Shirts are available in light blue, tan and yellow; in small, medium, large and extra large -- 100% cotton. Proceeds go to benefit the Council's treasury.

... ANNUAL DUES: As you can see from the articles in this issue, the Council has made giant strides in efforts to protect the gopher tortoise from decimation in the southeast. It is most heartwarming and rewarding to be an active member of this vital organization. We need the financial support of everyone who receives this publication and, because the membership year begins at the time of the annual meeting, your dues are now payable for 1986. Due to an oversight, I don't have quite enough dues envelopes to include one in each issue of the newsletter, so those I expect to attend the meeting and pay dues at that time, will not receive an envelope but will receive a blue slip indicating membership information.

Our system is such that inquiries and memberships usually come in to the secretary, Ellen Nicol. At that office, memberships are entered, sample TTBS sent out, and correspondence answered. Checks are then sent to Robert Taylor in Ft. Myers for deposit to the GTC account at a bank there. His address is Dr. Robert Taylor, Nature Center of Lee County, P.O. Box #####, Ft. Myers, FL 33906, if you have any questions about your check. The secretary's address is Rt. #, Box ####, Anthony, FL 32617, in case you do not have a dues envelope, have other matters of a correspondence nature, or wish to submit material for inclusion in the newsletter, which is always heartily appreciated.

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The November annual meeting promises to be great. Don't miss it!
SEE Y'ALL IN ALABAMA IN NOVEMBER...

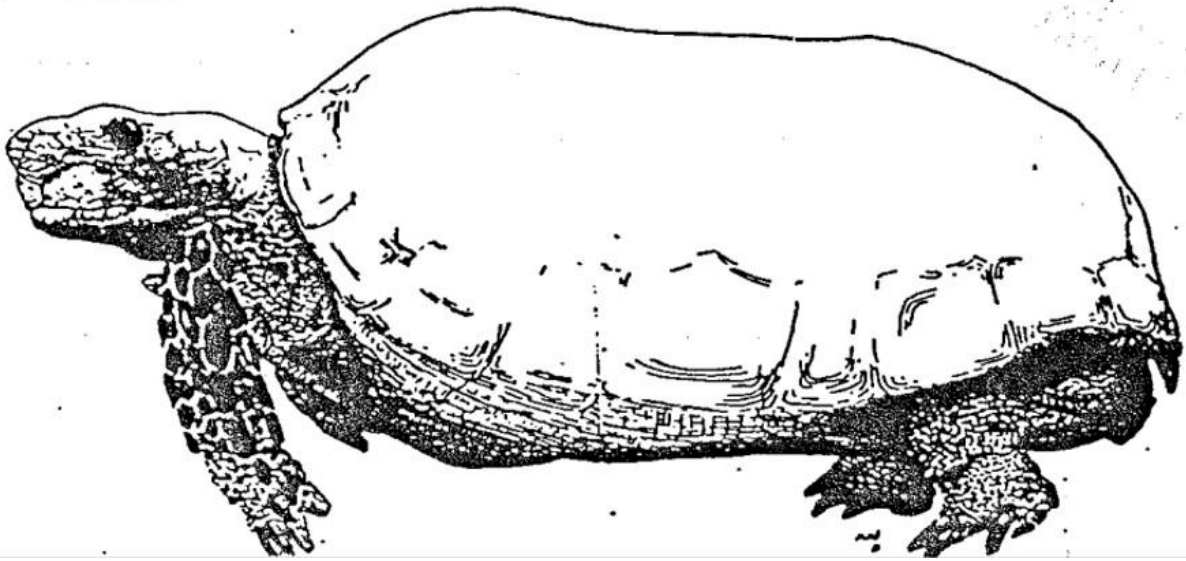


Image: Original artwork for the newsletter of the Gopher Tortoise Council.

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