



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.

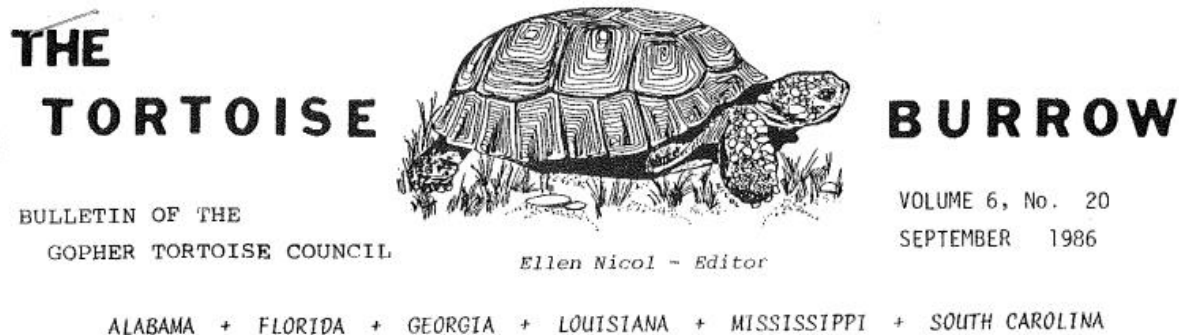


Image: Original artwork and letterhead for the newsletter of the Gopher Tortoise Council

1986 ANNUAL GOPHER TORTOISE COUNCIL MEETING ISSUE 1986

Wekiwa Springs State Park Apopka, FL. Noc. 7 - 9

Wekiwa Springs State Park is located north of Orlando and east of Apopka, 3 miles west of I-4, off S.R. 436. Driving along S.R. 436 FROM Orlando TO Apopka, turn right at the light at Wekiwa Springs Road (Albertsons and Zayres are at intersection). Drive approximately 3 miles along Wekiwa Springs Road. The entrance to the Park is on the right, marked by a sign. Follow signs to the Group Camp. Those who are driving from the north may wish to exit I-75 between Ocala and Wildwood in order to travel on U.S. 441 to Apopka, thereby avoiding Orlando. There is a park entrance fee (\$1.00 for driver and 50¢ for each passenger) but it will be waived only for those spending the night(s) in the park.

Gopher tortoises primarily inhabit the sandhill habitat in the park. In addition to the sandhill habitat, pine flatwoods and sand pine scrub also occur in the park. During the Sunday

field trip, the results of some of the management practices employed at Wekiwa will be seen and explained.

This year's meeting will focus on the non-sandhill habitats in which gopher tortoises are found, and the management techniques used to maintain those habitats. One objective of the open panel discussion on Saturday will be to develop a set of criteria for the management of non-sandhill habitats. The format of the main Saturday session is informal, and audience participation is welcomed.

TENTATIVE MEETING AGENDA

Friday, November 7, 1986

4:00 – 5:30 pm	Registration – Dining Hall	SUNDAY: Walking field trip to
5:30 – 7:30 pm	Social – Dining Hall	management areas at Wekiwa 9
7:30 pm	Dinner – Dining Hall	to 11. (Gopher tortoises can be seen.
9:30 pm	Informal Discussions	SUNDAY: Afternoon canoe trip.
		See registration for, page 7.

Saturday, November 8

7:00 – 8:30 am	Breakfast – Dining Hall	
8:00 – 9:30 am	Registration – Dining Hall	
9:00 – 9:10 am	Welcoming Remarks: <u>Classroom Building</u> .	Paul Perras,
	Superintendent of Wekiwa Springs State Park AND Dr. I. Jack Stout,	University of Central Florida
9:10 – 10:00 am	<u>Keynote address</u> : Florida Plant Communities: Then and Now. Major	
	James A. Stevenson, Department of Natural Resources	
10:00 – 10:30 am	Fire and the Dynamics of Scrub Habitat. Dr. Ronald L. Myers,	
	The Nature Conservancy	
10:30 – 11:00 am	Coffee Break	David Breininger, Bionetics, KSC
11:00 – 11:20 am	Gopher Tortoises in Scrub and Slash Pine on Kennedy Space Center.	
11:20 – 11:40 am	Preserving Tortoise Populations Amid a Sea of Concrete: Initial Steps	
	and Recommendations. Jim Cox, Florida Game and Fresh Water	
	Fish Commission	
11:40 – noon	Announcements (as yet unscheduled)	
Noon – 1:15 am	Lunch – Dining Hall	
1:15 – 2:15 pm	Speakers: Dr. David J. Morafka, California State University,	
	Dominguez Hills; Dr. Gustavo Aguirre, Instituto de Ecología, Mexico	
	and Dr. Gary Adest, University of California, San Diego, will discuss	
	their research efforts with the Bolson tortoise (<i>Gopherus</i>	
	<i>flavomarginatus</i>). (Classroom Building)	

- 2:15 – 3:15 pm Open panel discussion on management of non-sandhill habitat in Florida, with audience participation. Moderator: Dr. I. Jack Stout, and panelist: Major James A. Stevenson, David Breining, and others.
- 3:15 – 3:45 pm Coffee Break
- 3:45 – 4:45 pm Continuation of Panel Discussion
- 4:45 – 6:00 pm Federal and State Reports; Business Meeting
- 6:00 – 7:00 pm Informal Discussion
- 7:00 – 9:00 pm Dinner – Dining Hall

Sunday, November 9

- 7:00 – 8:30 am Breakfast – Dining Hall
- 9:00 – 11:00 am Field trip to management areas of Wekiwa – Major James A. Stevenson, Leader
- 11:00 am Adjourn

Prepared by Terry Linley

Because of the special rate being extended to Conference participants, reservations for meals and lodging will be necessary. Lodging consists of dormitory-style bunk beds (sexes segregated). Conferees should bring linens, pillow, soap, and a blanket. Campsites are available at Wekiwa for \$6.00 per night. (see June issue of THE TORTOISE BURROW for more information. Those who don't have the issue may write for one to editor). There are motels in the area: Days Inn, Orlando; Silver Palms Motel, Apopka; LaCasa Motor Inn, Altamonte Springs, Holiday Inn, Altamonte Springs and Ramada Inn, Altamonte Springs. Write editor for details. See later in this issue for registration form and other information. Send completed form and check to Ellen Nicol – BEFORE NOVEMBER 2. Maps of the campsite itself are also available upon request, when you send in registration form.

Menus are prepared at this time. If you wish a copy, please let Ellen know when you send in your registration and check. We are told that alcoholic beverages are prohibited and that the rule is strictly enforced at the State Park. Checks for both food and lodging AND registration should be made payable to The Gopher Tortoise Council

You will note that a dues envelope is enclosed with this issue. If convenient, you may use that for your dues and also your return registration; it all goes to the same place. However, checks should be made out separately, if possible, to avoid confusion as to just what you are paying for. Failing that, at least please indicate clearly what each part of the sum covers. Dues

are due as of December. They may also be paid at the meeting. It is hoped that current members will consider the work done by the GTC to be worthy of another year's membership. The folks listed below are REALLY enthusiastic about our efforts and demonstrate it by becoming contributing and sustaining members:

Gatling, R. – FL

Karlsson, J. – RI

Kuchapsky, D. – MI

Shimer, S. – FL

Thomas, R. & L. – FL

Williams, J. – FL (Sustaining)

Hope I haven't missed anyone. We thank these plus all the other members who joined in the past few months. Tell your friends about us, and remember that the editor will always send sample TTBs to anyone even remotely interested in joining. Don't hesitate to ask!

BOLSON TORTOISE EXPERTS TO BE FEATURED AT 1986 GTC ANNUAL MEETING

Would it surprise you to know that *Gopherus polyphemus* is not the only gopher tortoise that digs lengthy burrows that serve as home to dozen of other small creatures? If so, then it is time for you to meet *G. flavomarginatus*, the Bolson tortoise, an endangered resident of the highlands of northern Mexico, and the nearest living relative of our southeastern gopher tortoise.

As a special feature of this year's GTC annual meeting, a trio of biologists, all of whom have worked with the Bolson tortoise conservation program since its inception, will present a mini-symposium on the species. Dr. David Morafka (California State University – Dominguez Hills) will discuss the evolution, biogeography and recent history of *G. flavomarginatus*; Dr. Gary Adest (University of California – San Diego) will review time budgets, movements and regulation of body temperature; and Dr. Gustavo Aguirre (Instituto de Ecología, Mexico) will speak on growth, sexual dimorphism, survivorship, and the project's husbandry efforts, which include incubators, a nursery and exclosures.

This should be a wonderful opportunity for two groups of people working with similar animals in very different regions to share our ideas, our research successes and failures, and our hopes for the future.

Dale Jackson

BY WAY OF CLARIFICATION...

In the June issue of TTB, on page 6 was a newspaper article entitled "Is It Educational or a Sideshow." In it, Steve Carey, a Mobile College biologist was misquoted. In a letter to the editor, Steve writes:

"In the June issue of The Tortoise Burrow was a reprint of a Mobile Press/Register article concerning the Gulf States Rattlesnake Festival held in Mobile. In that article I was quoted as saying that the festival should involve the roundup of the cottonmouth, not the eastern diamondback rattlesnake. This is a misquote. I have never encouraged the collection of any reptile species at one of these festivals or roundups. What I did say was that if the festival's intent was to reduce the incidence of poisonous snakebite, then why focus on the eastern diamondback, which is rarely encountered, instead of the more common cottonmouth. Of course, the point of the festival is really fundraising, and the exploitation of the eastern diamondback is perceived by the festival's sponsors as the best means to raise funds.

"There has been an effort to put a stop to the Gulf States Rattlesnake Festival, and letters of protest from members of the GTC would certainly help. Send letters to the MOBILE JAYCEES, P.O. BOX ####, MOBILE, AL 36660. Let them know that you are opposed to these destructive festivals and that it creates a negative image of the Jaycees to sponsor such events. Sincerely,

/S/ Steven D. Carey"

Farther along in this issue is a proposed resolution on this subject, by David H. Nelson of the University of South Alabama. Steve Carey informs us that he worked on this resolution with David Nelson.

Postcards offered for sale in June TTB sold briskly at 6 for \$1.00. Still have a few left, and will have some at meeting. Latest sale offer is calendars for 1987. Cheap, and EVERYONE needs calendars!

PROPOSED RESOLUTION

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE, ALABAMA ACADEMY OF SCIENCE

Whereas, rattlesnake rodeos and roundups (as held in Opp and Mobile) promote the unnecessary and indiscriminate killing of snakes and other vertebrate animals (some of which are officially recognized as threatened or seriously declining),

And whereas, these activities are ecologically damaging – resulting in the destruction of the natural fauna,

And whereas, these activities encourage persons untrained in the capture and handling of venomous snakes to collect such animals, thus exposing themselves to the risk of toxic snakebite,

And whereas, these activities disrupt the delicate balance within the natural ecosystem,

And whereas, an equal concern exists for potential, similar, senseless exploitation of our botanical heritage,

Therefore, be it resolved, that the Executive Committee of the Alabama Academy of Science goes on record as opposing rattlesnake rodeos and roundups,

And be it further resolved, that the Academy expresses its grave concern for the preservation of our total natural heritage, encouraging its members to take an active role in identifying and offering alternate solutions to all events and situations which would seriously and deleteriously affect the quality of nature which we hope to transmit to our posterity.

David H. Nelson
Department of Biology
University of South Alabama (Mobile, AL. 36608)
(###) ###-####

NATIONAL-FOREST TORTOISE HUNTS ILLEGAL UNDER NEW FLORIDA RULE

By Dana McElroy, Staff Writer, The Florida Times-Union, Jacksonville, FL. Tues., July 1, 1986
(Reprinted with permission)

PALATKA – Beginning today, a new state regulation makes it illegal to harvest gopher tortoises in Florida's national forests. The new rule, developed with the U.S. Forest Service and passed by the Florida Game and Fresh Water Fish Commission, bans hunting the tortoises on 1.1 million acres in the Ocala, Osceola and Apalachicola national forests.

The gopher tortoise, listed as a state species of special concern, has had a steadily declining population because of development of its upland habitat and harvest by gopher hunters, said Don Wood, the commission's endangered-species coordinator.

As one of four North American tortoise species, the gopher is characterized by stumpy hind feet and flattened shovel-like forelimbs with which it digs burrows. The tortoises thrive in an area from the coastal plain in eastern Louisiana to southern South Carolina. Although it is found throughout Florida, the slow-growing reptile is more plentiful in North Florida and South Georgia.

It generally has a sandhill habitat – dry areas with longleaf pines, turkey oaks and wire grass, which is the tortoise’s main food source. “It has declined in numbers considerably,” Wood said. “The decline is mainly due to a conflict between human needs and gopher needs.”

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Although development has destroyed many tortoise areas, poachers seeking the gopher meat play a large part in the species’ decline, Wood said. Traditionally, the gopher tortoise has been a food source in Florida. In the Great Depression, it was eaten so extensively that it was tagged the “Hoover chicken.”

Limited hunting of gophers outside national forests is allowed, but state regulations prohibit the sale of gopher meat or the destruction of tortoise burrows.

When homeowners or developers discover tortoise burrows on their parcels, they are required either to leave them in place or get a permit from the Game and Fresh Water Fish Commission to have the tortoises moved, Wood said. This year, the commission has issued eight such permits for large developments.

Last year, the commission limited the harvest season in Florida from six months to three months: October, November and December. And hunters are prohibited from possessing more than two tortoises at any time. But enforcement of the rules is difficult on private land, Wood said. The commission now is conducting a study to better determine how many tortoises exist and how to protect the species.

Dale Jackson, a past chairman and member of the Gopher Tortoise Council, said that the ban on taking tortoises from national forests is a good start, but that more needs to be done. The Council is a multistate, private organization concerned with the preservation of tortoises and other species.

“Eventually we’re going to push for prohibiting harvest totally,” Jackson said. Enforcement of the rules also needs to be stricter, he said. Wood said violations are second-degree misdemeanors with a maximum punishment of six days in jail and a \$500. fine.

Two of our good members have sent in other newspaper articles, which the editor always appreciates. B. Schauer, in Jacksonville, sent the following from the July 17, 1986 edition of the Florida Times-Union (Reprinted with permission) It was a letter to the editor.

MOTORISTS WERE PATIENT DURING RESCUE
OF TURTLE

“I received a spiritual lift in a quite unexpected manner recently. Driving to work, I saw a large turtle that had stopped on its way across the road in an obvious state of distress.

After waving the traffic in both directions to stop, I then grabbed the big turtle and walked about 40 feet to the edge of a canal where I released him. I expected some horn honking and to be cursed at. No horn blew, but a businessman opened his window and yelled, “Thataway to go!” Just behind him, three men in a truck with landscaping equipment shouted, “Right on!”

The cars behind me patiently waited until I returned to my car. I proceeded on my way with good feelings about these people caught up in the rush of morning traffic who openly displayed patience and compassion for the life of a lowly reptile.

Victor N. Raiser,
Atlantic Beach “

(Many people in Florida call them gopher turtles, instead of gopher tortoises. We don’t know if this gentleman rescued a gopher or a large Florida water turtle, perhaps a female on her way to a nesting site, or returning. Both can grow to the “large” size he describes. If it was a gopher, I hope he didn’t release it in the water. We’ve had people tell us they did that, to our dismay. Let’s just hope it was a big slider species. Ed.)

The following clip was one I saved from many years ago, undated, and probably cut from the West Palm Beach Post, or one sent to me by a relative who knew of my interest. It is another letter to the editor.

SECOND CHANCE FOR TURTLE

“While driving east on PGS Boulevard, I narrowly missed running over a turtle whose shell must have measured 15 inches. In my rear view mirror I saw the car behind me stop off the road. The driver got out, held up his arms to warn other oncoming cars, then quickly picked up the turtle and carried him over to the north side of the road.

This was a big turtle who had been around a long time. Thanks to the fellow behind me, who was driving an older light green convertible, that turtle is still around and maybe will be around for a long time to come.

I feel somewhat honored to have seen this class act. To the young man who took the trouble, let me add my thanks to the thanks for the turtle.

William Casey
Palm Beach Gardens”

(These incidents represent two satisfying rescues. Unfortunately, it is not uncommon to see a turtle on the road but be unable to stop due to traffic, etc., and then the rear view mirror see drivers behind deliberately steer a course in order to score a bull’s eye on the confused reptile. I should also remind anyone who sees a turtle or tortoise in the road, to carry it off the road in the direction in which it was going (assuming you are able to attempt a rescue). If it is returned to the side from which it entered the roadway, it will only get back on the road to pursue its planned course. Luckily, we don’t see many live or dead turtles on or along the main highways, because of the state-erected fences that serve to keep cars and animals separated. Some, however, do manage to get through. Ed.)

Sent to us by Bob Joslin from the TOWN TALK, Alexandria-Pineville, LA., Saturday, 5/24/86

GOPHER TORTOISE EXTINCT IN LA

By Elliott Minor
Associated Press

Alma, GA (AP) – Life in the fast lane can be risky for the gopher tortoise, a gentle turtle unique to the southeast, that is often forced to hit the road in search of food and romance. Larry Landers, a wildlife biologist who studied the turtles extensively for the Georgia Department of Natural Resources, said the gopher tortoise already is extinct in Louisiana, rare in Mississippi and declining in South Carolina, Georgia, Alabama and Florida.

A relative of the Texas and desert tortoises native to northern Mexico and the western United States, the gopher tortoise can live for more than 60 years on the sand ridges that were left when the oceans receded from the southeast thousands of years ago. The turtles dig deep burrows in the sand and share them through the winter with at least 30 other reptiles and amphibians, including the rattlesnake, the indigo snake, which the federal government has declared a threatened species, and the rare gopher frog, according to Landers. It’s an important thing to have that burrow, “ he said. “It’s like a small community.”

In the spring, hundreds of gopher tortoises are killed by motorists as they wander onto highways searching for mates and tender grasses that grow along the sides of the road, said Landers, director of the Tall Timbers Research Station, a non-profit wildlife research institution in Tallahassee, Fla. While autos probably are the greatest cause for turtle deaths, the presence of the slow-moving tortoises along the highways makes them easy targets for poachers and raccoons.

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Poachers blend tortoise legs into a traditional southern stew that is sometimes featured at church socials, which raccoons are the chief predator of turtle eggs, which are laid in June and hatch in September, he said. "My study shows that they should not be harvested (captured)," Landers said. "They have a very low reproductive rate. The populations grows at most probably 3 percent a year and there is not much of a safety factor if you allow people to ...eat them." But he emphasized that poachers are only a small problem in terms of the tortoise's total conservation needs.

Landers contends the tortoise is being driven from its habitat by expanded farming and tree planting on the sand ridges, land clearing for urban growth and a lack of any official effort to preserve the ridges. Through the centuries, lightning helped to maintain grasses on the ridges by igniting forest fires that burned away trees and other plants.

With better forest fire control, however, trees have survived, denying sunlight to the grasses, which are the mainstay of the turtle's diet, he said. "In good habitat, they'll stay on an area less than 10 acres," he said. "But as the forest gets real shady, the tortoises end up along the roads. That's where the sunlight is, where the grasses still grow." Landers recommends controlled burning of the ridges to keep them in a grassy state, but he admits "the more people you have in Georgia, the less they want to see smoke. There are a lot of animals that are going to disappear," he added.

As a non-game animal, the turtles are not supposed to be hunted, but Landers said Georgia has done less than the other southeastern states to protect them. "There's a lot of biologists in the state that care," he said. "It's a political thing. Right now, they'd rather protect deer and turkeys – the game species – because the support for wildlife in general comes from the hunter, fees he pays for hunting licenses."

“Our main thrust is trying to keep these people who are commercially into it (capturing turtles) from doing so,” said Joe Kurz, the state’s assistant chief of game management. “We don’t have the inclination at this time to list them (as endangered species) in the state of Georgia.”

Because of the shortage of habitat, female turtles are laying their eggs along roads and in the tracks of dirt roads, where the nests are crushed by cars or destroyed by raccoons, said Landers. Ideally, they would lay their eggs in front of their burrows on the sand ridges and cover them with sand that is warmed by the sun. Tortoises do not mate until they are between 15 to 20 years old. The females each lay about seven eggs, which hatch in about 90 days. “They’re a very important species,” said Landers. “They’re very docile. They don’t bite and that makes them unusual for turtles.”

CLIP-AND-MAIL REGISTRATION FORM see page 2)

Date _____

Name(s) _____

Address(es): _____ City _____

___ Pre-registration (\$8.00 reg., \$5.00 student) (At door \$10.00 and \$7.00)

___ Meals and lodging at Wekiwa, Fri. pm, to Sun. am \$34.00

___ Lodging ONLY (check which nights) Friday (\$3.25) _____ Saturday (\$3.25) _____

___ Meals ONLY (check which meals) Fri. pm (\$10.00) _____ Sat. am (\$5.00) _____

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

The package deal at \$34.00 is about \$7.00 less than when purchased individually.

Send to: Ellen Nicol, ###, Box #####, Anthony, FL 32617 ### ###-#### BEFORE Nov. 2

Rooms in cottages assigned upon arrival.

GOPHER TORTOISE PROPOSED FOR FEDERAL LISTING

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service formally proposed on July 8, 1986 (Federal Register 51[130] 24723-24727) to list the “western population” of the gopher tortoise as a Threatened Species.

This population occurs from the Tombigbee and Mobile Rivers in Alabama to southeastern Louisiana. Habitat degradation and fragmentation as well as human exploitation were cited as primary reasons for the decline of this population. This proposal will be followed by a brief comment period, during with time interested parties may request public hearings. Following this period and any subsequent hearings, the Service will announce its final decision.

Dale Jackson

EARLY NOTICE ON GOPHER TORTOISE RELOCATION
SYMPOSIUM, GAINESVILLE, FL. 27 June 1987

The Florida Game and Fresh Water Fish Commission, the Gopher Tortoise Council and the Florida State Museum will co-sponsor a symposium to discuss and evaluate programs to relocate gopher tortoise populations from areas destined for development. The symposium and resulting Proceedings will include the results of several recent relocation studies, in addition to presentations on related subjects. The meeting will be held 27 June 1987 at the University of Florida. Persons wishing to attend or speak at the symposium should contact Mr. Don Wood, Florida Game and Fresh Water Fish Commission, ### #. ##### #., Tallahassee, FL 32301.

A FEW QUICK NOTES: Correction; Dale Jackson's office phone number is: (###) ###-####. Co-chairman, Mrs. Terry Linley's new address is ##### #., Ft. Pierce, FL 33451. She may be reached by phone by calling her husband's work number (###) ###-####, but you must ask for John Linley, not Terry, or the call will not be put through. John will put you in touch with Terry by that means.

The editor is producing 1987 calendars with a sketch of a tortoise at the top and the 12 months below on 8 x 11" card stock – only \$1.00 each, including postage. Discounts for quantity purchases. At that price, give them to your Humane Societies, local museums, your veterinarian or any place you can tack one up on a wall. Make checks out to ELLEN NICOL, (not GTC) and percentage of proceeds will go to GTC treasury. Limited quantities – no space left to illustrate the sketch, but some similar postcards. Cash okay. That's one dollar each, folks! If any left, will have some at meeting.

At press time, I am still negotiating the return of an adult pair of desert tortoises given me after being rescued from someone who had them for 20 years (kept indoors) and who wanted them "put down." They will be sent to the California Turtle and Tortoise's Club's Adoption Committee, from where they will be adopted out, which is how they handle tortoises that can't be released in the wild. The story will make a good Grass Roots column in the December issue and will warm your heart at Christmas time as these tortoises "GO HOME" where they belong.

SEE Y'ALL AT THE MEETING IN NOVEMBER AND SEND IN YOUR RESERVATIONS.

Ellen Nicol
Gopher Tortoise Council
Rt. #, Box #####
Anthony, FL 32617

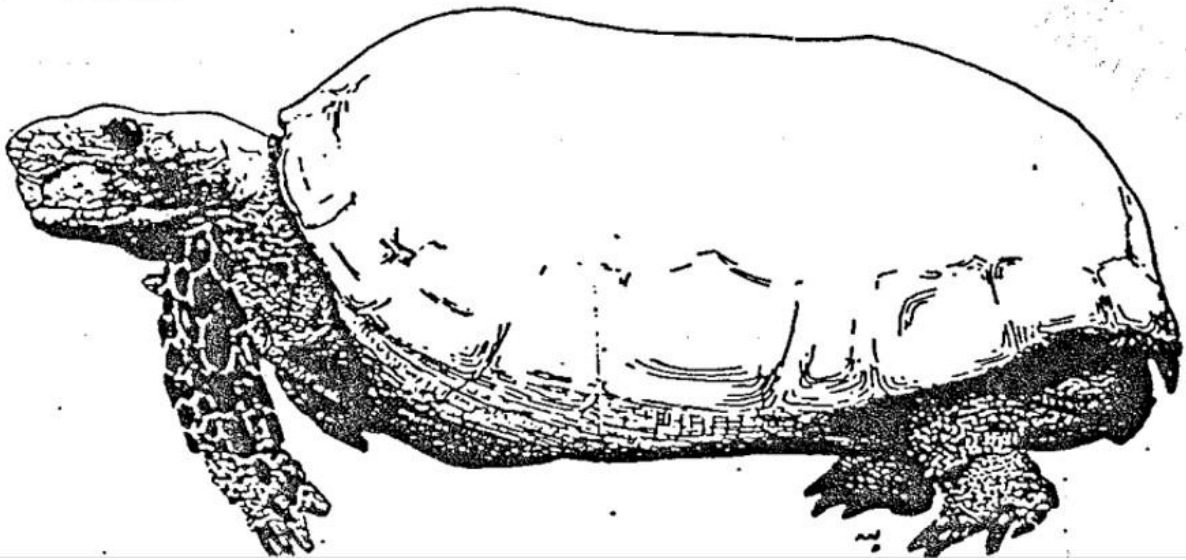


Image: Original artwork for the newsletter of the Gopher Tortoise Council.

This document was created and transcribed by Caitlin Jones
July 2026