



## **Gulf Coast Turtle and Tortoise Society**

1227 Whitestore Houston, Texas 77073

281-443-3383 – Information / FAX

[Info@GCTTS.org](mailto:Info@GCTTS.org)

[www.GCTTS.org](http://www.GCTTS.org)

### **Newsletter – Spring 2003**

The Gulf Coast Turtle & Tortoise Society is an all-volunteer, nonprofit organization dedicated to the welfare and conservation of all species of turtles and tortoises. The members of GCTTS offer such services as rescue, rehabilitation, release, and adoption of turtles and tortoises. We maintain a telephone and e-mail hot line to answer questions and handle emergencies. We also maintain a website with information about turtles and tortoises care as well as a forum where questions can be posted and answered. Members receive our newsletter. Education is a central focus of our group - we are active year round giving seminars, participating in expositions, providing care sheets, and making presentations on turtles at no charge. Correspondence, inquires, and donations may be sent to the address above.

### **GCTTS UPCOMING EVENTS-2003**

#### **Earthdays**

|          |  |            |  |
|----------|--|------------|--|
| April 5  | The Woodlands  | May 17, 18 | Bayou City Breeders Expo   |
| April 12 | Rice University,<br>Citizens Environmental Coalition | June 22    | Houston Arboretum<br>and Nature Center, 2-4 pm.,<br>Larry White DVM,<br>"Plants for Habitats,"<br>open to members and public |
| April 19 | Brazos Bend State Park                               |            |  |
| April 26 | Scout Fair, Reliant Center, 12-5 pm.                 |            |  |
| May 24   | KRBE Earthday, Tinsley park                          |            |  |

### **HELPING TURTLES SURVIVE**

By GCTTS member Beverly Logan

Helping GCTTS coordinate this newsletter has brought some reflections I would like to share. Remembering the first time I went to a meeting at the Houston Arboretum and Nature Center, bringing a small turtle and my daughter. The first three Officers at that time were so cordial and informative, as I didn't know what we had, a turtle or tortoise. Watching GCTTS grow since the 90's has been something to think about also. This organization has grown tremendously from a monthly social gathering to Outreach programs of city, county, schools, and libraries, and our international Space Center NASA, just to mention a few. All of the three GCTTS original officers have gone through either personal problems or tragedy. GCTTS almost disbanded, but continued with the help of members and volunteers.

From all the GCTTS experiences and volunteering I believe the evolution of GCTTS is also noteworthy. This organization has taught above and beyond the importance of turtles and tortoises being in their natural environments. Coming from having two box turtles in a galvanized horse trough for 3 years previously, I was educated about outside environments as a must. Picking up an additional box turtle while camping to add to ours was also advised against. Seeing the necks and depression leave as the three box turtles were put outside in a natural habitat the first time is very vivid in my mind today. The events that GCTTS brings to the public every year are also very noteworthy. GCTTS people involved are very, friendly and educated about turtle husbandry, have printed information on hand as well, and can direct a turtle problem, illness etc, to a qualified reptile vet, if necessary.

I still have one original box turtle "Wilbur" who came on a relative's patio with cuts in her shell from a city field mower, happily living outside since 1991. The Earthday events and programs GCTTS schedules every year are looked forward to and enjoyable. The sign "Helping Turtles Survive" hung at GCTTS events reminds me that a turtle saved is for a future generation to see.

**WHAT IS THE HOTLINE FOR?  
281-443-3383**

Rescues, adoptions, turtle care information, directions to events, event times, turtle & tortoise care information, volunteering for Earthdays, outreach, making copies, helping with the newsletter, etc.

**LIVING WITH A RED-FOOT TORTOISE  
- THE DREAD OF WINTER -  
By GCTTS Member Ann Smylie**

I acquired Bozette, my first South American red-foot tortoise, ten years ago in the early summer. She was captive bred, and about half her mature size of 12 inches long. I chose a red-foot because they can be kept in Houston's humid climate, they are a manageable size, and they are beautiful, personable tortoises. I wanted to give the best possible care, so I sought advice from a friend that had some experience with red-foots, and read every book and article I could find on them.

Getting help to build an eight foot by sixteen foot tortoise pen of landscape timbers, I equipped it with suitable plants for shade and hiding places, provided shaded water sources and covered corners which were kept moist for mud digging. A wooden lip was attached around the top of the pen to prevent Bozette from climbing out. A water sprinkler kept the humidity high.

All went well that first summer. Bozette thrived, she ate well with her diet being supplemented with grasses and edible leaves and flowers, but in late September when the temperature dropped below 70 degrees, she had to be brought into my house. I was not really prepared for winter life with a red foot tortoise!

My job that winter was to keep Bozette warm, prevent dehydration, and convince her to eat. First I purchased a large two-foot by eight-foot stock tank and equipped it with two U.V. heat lights to keep the temperature at 85-90 degrees in one area, and somewhat cooler in the other so she would have a choice of temperatures. Since Bozette was an immature female, I didn't have to worry about supplying her with a special area with a substrate suitable for digging, in case she decided to lay eggs in the winter. At first I placed newspaper on the bottom of the stock tank, but I read that this was not a good choice. It could be detrimental to her leg muscles and cause problems with her walking. Hay and leaves were preferred.

I placed a large shallow dish of water in the stock tank, but this did not work out. When I returned from work, a wet smelly mess was all over the bottom of the tank. Bozette liked to soak in her water. That is the worst part of having a tortoise in the house - what I call "the zoo smell." Fortunately Bozette likes to drink from a bowl. She is my only tortoise who readily does this. Every morning and

night I let her drink her fill and supplement this with a 20 minute soak every three days.

Adjusting her diet was also a problem. She was not really happy in an enclosed tank inside a house no matter how pleasant I tried to make it. I offered her everything recommended for red-foots and she eventually became better adjusted to indoor life, and ate well, although not with the same gusto as she did when outside. I picked her favorite outdoor food, but it wasn't as exciting as finding and harvesting it herself.

Every winter I dread dragging in those stock tanks and setting them up. I now have four large red-foots, two males and two females. Bozette is now mature and must have a firm mixture of fine peat moss, sand and straw at least 12 inches deep in case she lays more eggs.

South American red-foots are said to do fine if kept alone, but I have found that my tortoises are much more active and eat much better if I keep the two males and two females together. Just don't mix the sexes. The males will not leave the females alone and mating tortoises are noisy, especially at night.

**Signs of Dehydration**

Dehydrated turtles and tortoises are: Usually underweight compared to a healthy specimen of similar proportions ... the eyes are almost always sunken ... in acute cases the center of the cornea may be depressed ... skin elasticity loose ... the skin may be unusually dry ... and the surface powdery. Not infrequently, turtle and tortoise enthusiasts are confronted by acutely dehydrated specimens ... this condition, and others are the result of poor husbandry on the part of previous keepers ... many leave dealer's premises in this condition



Ann's tortoise **Bozette** has gone to many Earthdays, educational programs, etc, to help the GCTTS.

However due to her laying eggs recently she must spend only a limited time now helping in Outreach.

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**A Sincere GCTTS Thank You! Goes to:**

Richard Weinberg – for Newsletter Copies  
Wendy Logan and Chris Varela – for formatting

**KNOWING THE PREDATOR**

From various sources

RACCOONS ... Have adapted in all communities ... are nocturnal ... roam at night looking for small mammals, fish and turtles in backyard ponds ... are seasonal eaters. Spring is an especially dangerous time for your pond turtles ... and outdoor habitat turtles. TIPS ... sprinkle CAYENNE PEPPER around outside of ponds and pens (only if you have water runoff) and around yard ... place AMMONIA-soaked rags around yard and under house.

Other predators include OPOSSUM, COYOTES and SKUNKS, also nocturnal ... all three are omnivorous and can defend themselves by biting.

Should you have a predator who is fixed on coming in your yard and possibly eating your turtles ... traps can be obtained from the City of Houston Animal Control ... or traps can be purchased at feed stores ... a barking dog may stop predators ... when he is left outside at night!

From the Forum on [www.gctts.org](http://www.gctts.org)

A frequent question and a good answer from Marlaina:

***“Urgent - my Water Turtle won’t eat”***

These are reasons that come to mind why a turtle won’t eat:

- Too cool-I would keep a turtle 80-82 degrees. But it must be warmed up slowly, a few degrees a day.
- Frightened-don’t stand there and watch it eat. Put the food outside the hiding place and get back from tank. It needs an underwater hiding place, and you will need non- floating food for this.
- Stress from another aggressive turtle.
- It doesn’t know it is suppose to eat turtle sticks (if that’s what you are feeding.) Have romaine (not head) lettuce floating on top and aquarium plants for it to eat. It will also need animal foods like feeder fish cut in half or cut up pinkie mice. Insects are good if not fed too often.
- Day length is too short. Part of hibernation may be from shortened days, so make sure light is bright and on for 14 hrs.
- If an adult female, it may be nearing egg-laying time, or if no land access is available it could be egg bound.
- It is sick. After following the above, if it does not eat in a week, be sure to get a qualified vet to check it out

See the Water Turtle Care Sheet on our web site. If it is sick, the other water turtles have been exposed, and you need to watch closely for any signs of illness.

Many of our members have extensive turtle and tortoise knowledge. If you have a question about turtle or tortoise care please post it to our forum at

[www.gctts.org](http://www.gctts.org)

**REPTILE VETS RECOMMENDED by GCTTS:**

Larry White, DVM  
Briarcrest Veterinary Clinic  
1492 Wilcrest  
Houston, TX 77042  
713-789-8320

Robin Scott, DVM  
Safari Animal Care Centers  
2450 E. Main, Suit D  
League City, TX 77573  
281-332-5612

Dale Lonsford, DVM  
Deer Park Animal Hospital  
202 West San Augustine  
Deer Park, Texas 77536  
281-479-0405

Mark Peckham, DVM  
Houston Mobile Vet Services  
10915 Arendale  
Houston, TX 77075  
713-708-8636

Dave Doherty, DVM  
Grogans Mill Pet Clinic  
25206 Grogans Mill Rd  
The Woodlands, TX 77380  
281-367-5726

**Board of Directors Meeting January 26, 2003**

The following Officers were elected by the Board of Directors for 2003-2004:

- Deb Parrish - President
- Bob Smither - Vice President
- Marlaina Barr - Treasurer
- Judy Meschwitz - Secretary

According to our Bylaws, the Board is elected by the active members of the GCTTS. To accomplish this, we are publishing a proposed slate for the Board below and are asking members to Approve, Reject, or to add Write In names. Proposed Slate:

|                | Approve | Reject |
|----------------|---------|--------|
| Marlaina Barr  | _____   | _____  |
| Wendy Browne   | _____   | _____  |
| Judy Meschwitz | _____   | _____  |
| Deb Parrish    | _____   | _____  |
| Tracy Scannell | _____   | _____  |
| Bob Smither    | _____   | _____  |
| Ann Smylie     | _____   | _____  |
| Julie Young    | _____   | _____  |

Write In \_\_\_\_\_

Our Board is limited by our bylaws to 9 members. Please vote for no more that 9 members, including any write ins.

Please send your vote to the GCTTS at the address on Page 1.

**A Turtle Coming out of Hibernation**

Is at first likely to be sluggish ... should have adequate water to drink ... a shallow pan for soaking may be necessary to replace water loss. Offer live foods ... to stimulate appetite ... add soluble multi-Vitamin preparation (specialty reptile vitamins) to drinking water. Eye trouble ... rinse with water ... be sure both eyes and nose are clean. In a day or two if runny nose and eye discharge remains ... definitely take to a reptile vet.

## **GOPHER TORTOISE CONSERVATION INITIATIVE 2003 COURSE OFFERINGS**

GTCl has been offering various courses related to gopher tortoise and upland habitat management and ecology. Nearly 2000 people have participated over the past three years. We invite you to join us to learn things they don't teach in college any more and that are needed by many field biologists and conservationists to do their jobs right.

The 2003 Course offerings include:

### **Three-Day Tortoise and Uplands Management Workshop**

In depth, hands on, in the field activities for land managers, researchers, consultants working with gopher tortoise and other upland species.

### **Developing Management and Monitoring Programs for Tortoises and Other Upland Species**

Full day program in the field and classroom on establishing goals, objectives, and creating reactive management plans to good monitoring programs. -For professional managers, government officials, researchers, and consultants.

### **Gopher Tortoise and other protected species in depth natural history based on current and on-going research**

For those who interpret nature, guides, volunteers, teachers, reporters, writers, and those who have to manage these species.-One Day

### **The role of Counties and Communities in protecting wildlife and their habitats "Home Rule"**

County and City elected officials and staff, conservation organizations, developers, state and federal officials. This program is designed to assist local efforts to create meaningful land acquisition programs, local regulations and other methods of protecting local resources. One Day

Courses are taught at the Ashton Biodiversity Research and Preservation Institute' biological field station, 15 miles west of Gainesville. GTCl is willing to teach the courses anywhere within the range of the gopher tortoise. This requires a local partner to handle arrangements and to help with various aspects of the program.

For Dates, Costs, and other information contact:

**Gopher Tortoise Conservation Initiative**  
**Ashton Biodiversity Research & Preservation Institute, Inc.**  
14260 W. Newberry Rd #331  
Newberry, Fl 32669  
352-495-7449 - Tortfarm2@aol.com

## **Electronic Newsletters, Anyone?**

If you would be willing to receive your GCTTS Newsletter via E-mail as a PDF document let us know at:  
[info@GCTTS.org](mailto:info@GCTTS.org)

PDF readers are freely available for all popular computing platforms from:

[www.adobe.com](http://www.adobe.com)

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## **Pictures for our Web Site**

Do you have any quality, copyright free, pictures of turtles and tortoises that you would like to share. Please send them as .jpg, .gif, or .png files to:

[BobSmither@GCTTS.org](mailto:BobSmither@GCTTS.org)

You can see other pictures of our favorite animals at:

<http://www.gctts.org/database-ro/chelonians/>

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## **Treasurer's Report – 2002-10-14 to 2003-02-28**

Marlaina Barr

|                  |           |
|------------------|-----------|
| Membership fees: | \$ 500.00 |
| Video Sales:     | \$ 80.00  |
| Donations:       | \$ 45.00  |

Total Income: \$500.00

|                 |          |
|-----------------|----------|
| Rehabilitation: | \$ 87.28 |
| Newsletter:     | \$ 74.00 |
| Internet:       | \$ 73.65 |
| Phone:          | \$ 59.84 |
| Administration: | \$ 22.20 |
| T-Shirts:       | \$ 1.50  |

Total Expenses: \$318.47

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## **GCTTS Working to Protect Endangered Turtles**

eBay is billed as the world's largest market. As such, just about everything is offered for sale there, including some items that should not be. The eBay policy on Endangered species is very good and is spelled out at:

<http://pages.ebay.com/help/community/png-wildlife.html>

It reads, in part: "Other Animal Products - Endangered or protected species, or any part of any endangered or protected species may not be listed on eBay."

GCTTS member Marlaina Barr is working hard to help eBay enforce its policy. Marlaina routinely monitors the auctions on eBay to see if someone is offering items derived from endangered turtles. When she spots a suspicious auction item she reports the auction to eBay support. She has been successful in getting several auctions of turtle parts pulled from eBay.

You can monitor eBay and other auction sites for suspicious auctions as well. In order to report a suspicious auction on eBay, you will need to register from the home page at:

<http://www.ebay.com/>

If you go to:

<http://pages.ebay.com/help/basics/select-RS.html>

you can report questionable auctions. You can enter a description of the auction and the auction number and forward your concerns to eBay support.

After an auction is reported, it can be bookmarked and then checked after a few days to make sure it has been removed.

This is a good way to help enforce the endangered species laws and can be done by anyone with sufficient interest. If you are interested in helping turtles in this way, contact Marlaina for more information.

The species on the CITES list can be found at:

[http://www.cites.org/eng/append/I\\_II.shtml](http://www.cites.org/eng/append/I_II.shtml)

### Rehab Report

Marlaina Barr

As always, Marlaina has been very busy with our rehabilitation program. The statistics for the most recent period are:

3-15-2002 to 2-28-2003

(a.b.c => males.females.unknown)

#### Incoming:

|                          |         |
|--------------------------|---------|
| 3 toe Box adult          | 12.10.0 |
| 3 toe Box juvenile       | 0.0.3   |
| 3 toe Box hatchling      | 0.0.8   |
| Ornate Box adult         | 3.0.0   |
| Eastern Box juvenile     | 0.0.1   |
| Res adult                | 7.8.0   |
| Res juvenile             | 2.3.11  |
| Res hatchling            | 0.0.28  |
| Cooter juvenile          | 0.0.3   |
| Cooter hatchling         | 0.0.28  |
| Mississippi Mud adult    | 1.0.0   |
| S. American Mud juvenile | 0.0.1   |
| Snapper adult            | 1.0.0   |
| Diamondback adult        | 0.1.0   |

#### Released:

|                  |         |
|------------------|---------|
| Res adult        | 10.13.0 |
| Res juvenile     | 0.0.6   |
| Res hatchling    | 0.0.18  |
| Cooter adult     | 0.1.0   |
| Cooter juvenile  | 0.0.2   |
| Cooter hatchling | 0.0.47  |

#### Adopted:

|                          |        |
|--------------------------|--------|
| 3 toe Box adult          | 8.10.0 |
| 3 toe Box juvenile       | 0.0.4  |
| 3 toe Box hatchling      | 0.0.1  |
| Ornate Box adult         | 3.1.0  |
| Eastern Box juvenile     | 0.0.1  |
| Diamondback adult        | 0.1.0  |
| Mississippi Map juvenile | 0.0.2  |
| Snapper adult            | 1.0.0  |
| S. American Mud juvenile | 0.0.1  |

#### In Rehab:

|                     |          |
|---------------------|----------|
| 3 toe Box adult     | 22.10.0  |
| 3 toe Box juvenile  | 0.0.3    |
| 3 toe Box hatchling | 0.0.6    |
| Ornate Box adult    | 1.0.0    |
| Eastern Box adult   | 1.0.0 ** |
| Res adult           | 2.1.0    |
| Res juvenile        | 0.2.6    |
| Res hatchling       | 0.0.4    |
| Cooter adult        | 1.0.0    |
| Cooter juvenile     | 0.0.1    |
| Cooter hatchling    | 0.0.12   |
| Mississippi Mud     | 1.0.0    |

\*\* Aggressive - cannot be housed with any other turtles. Some female box adults can not be housed with males - reduced rear shell areas will result in injury if mated.

At this time, all turtles are either in rehab or hibernation. Turtles will start becoming available for adoption after hibernation and subsequent evaluation, perhaps by mid April. Some will remain in rehab and others will be released.

Adoption is only available to our members. If you are interested in adopting a turtle or tortoise, call the hot line or send an e-mail to [info@GCTTS.org](mailto:info@GCTTS.org).

#### GCTTS News List (via e-mail)

If we don't have your e-mail address, you are missing out on important information from the GCTTS. Our low volume News list is used to make announcements of upcoming events, and much more. Sign up by sending a request to be added to the News list to:

[info@GCTTS.org](mailto:info@GCTTS.org)

# Gulf Coast Turtle & Tortoise Society Membership Application

Membership fees are our major source of funds. Your membership supports our many outreach and rehabilitation efforts. Members receive the GCTTS newsletter and can vote for our Board of Directors. Membership dues are:

|               |                              |
|---------------|------------------------------|
| Regular:      | \$15.00 per year per address |
| Contributing: | \$25.00 per year per address |
| Sponsoring:   | \$50.00 per year per address |

Please mail your membership application and dues to:

**Gulf Coast Turtle and Tortoise Society  
1227 Whitestone Lane  
Houston, Texas 77073**

Name(s) \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip Code \_\_\_\_\_

Phone \_\_\_\_\_ E-mail \_\_\_\_\_

What species of turtles and/or tortoises do you currently have? \_\_\_\_\_

**Volunteer Opportunities:**

Public Speaking \_\_\_ Booth Assistance \_\_\_ Exhibiting your Turtles \_\_\_ Helping at Programs \_\_\_

Hotline Assistance \_\_\_ E-mail Assistance \_\_\_ Website Assistance \_\_\_

Newsletter: Writing, Artwork, Layout, Typing, Copying Other \_\_\_\_\_

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