

From the GCTTS Wiki

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GCTTS Monthly Post for May, 2005

GCTTS Program at the Arboretum, 2-4 PM, May 22, 2005

The next GCTTS program will be at the Houston Arboretum, May 22, 2005. The Houston Arboretum is located at:

4501 Woodway Dr
Houston, TX 77056
(713) 681-8433
<http://www.houstonarboretum.org/>

From 2:00 to 3:00 we will have an exhibit of turtles & tortoises from around the world, refreshments and conversation. Everybody is welcome to bring a turtle or tortoise to display, but please have them in adequate containers (with a lid!) to prevent stress to the animals and bites to the humans. Please let us know at info@gctts.org (or the hotline, 281-443-3383) by May 15 which chelonians you will be bringing.

From 3:00 to 4:00 PM our speaker will be well known reptile vet Dr. Robin Scott from Safari Animal Care Centers. She will discuss the care and feeding of tortoises, and will also be available for any chelonian related questions. Dr. Scott is an expert on the care of turtles and tortoises, and keeps several herself.

If you have never made it to one of our programs, please consider attending this one as a first. We welcome your participation and look forward to meeting you.

GCTTS programs are always free and open to the public and educational material will be available at this program.

There will be a short business meeting after the program that GCTTS welcomes anyone to attend. One of the topics will be upcoming GCTTS programs and we'd love to have your input. Bring your ideas for making GCTTS an even better organization!

Mark you calendars for May 22nd!

BCBE Breeder Sale

The Bayou City Breeders Expo will be held from 10 AM to 5 PM on June 18 & 19, 2005 and will feature supplies, feeder animals, gifts and ONLY captive bred herps. GCTTS has been invited to offer an educational booth for several years at this event and volunteers are needed. Members and those interested in joining GCTTS with a basic knowledge of turtle/tortoise husbandry are welcome to offer care sheets to visitors, address the reality of healthy turtle care and other topics such as conservation, species identification and herp vet referrals. Staff will be needed from 10AM to 5PM both days to handle the steady crowd of curious visitors. Please let us know at info@gctts.org or the hotline, 281-443-3383, by June 1st if you plan to help at our booth or exhibit a turtle.

The Expo will be held at the Clarion Inn, located at 500 North Belt East, between Imperial Valley Dr. and the Hardy Toll Road. Admission is \$4 for children under 12 and \$6 for adults.

The June 2005 expo features additional educational opportunities in the form of live local venomous and non-venomous snake ID displays and speaker talks and presentations, which are included free with your paid admission to the expo. This is an excellent opportunity for interested residents, especially scouts, to learn more about our native snake species and how to correctly identify venomous snakes. These displays and lectures can help Boy Scouts meet some of the requirements for their Reptile and Amphibian Merit Badge. Additionally, all scouts that wear their Scout dress uniforms to the Expo will receive half-price admission!

Complete info on this event can be found at:

<http://www.houstonherp.com/BCBEbody.html>

An Invitation to participate OpenGCTTS

OpenGCTTS is a Wiki site dedicated to chelonians, their captive care, and their study. OpenGCTTS is a publicly available Wiki based on MediaWiki - the same open source platform used by the **Wikipedia** project. The Wikipedia, an openly created and edited encyclopedia, has over 500,000 articles of outstanding quality.

Ever wanted to add your \$.02 worth to turtle and tortoise care sheets? OpenGCTTS allows any visitor to the site to help create and edit the most detailed and up to date care and natural history articles about chelonians. Any site visitor can improve existing pages and add new pages.

Any information that is of interest to turtle and tortoise enthusiasts is welcome on OpenGCTTS. Please consider contributing to our care sheets, diets and species descriptions.

Point your browser to <http://www.gctts.org/OpenGCTTS> and take a look. If you know other turtle and tortoise enthusiasts who might be interested, please tell them about OpenGCTTS.

If you have any questions, direct them to info@gctts.org.

Can You Help the GCTTS Turtle Shuttle?

GCTTS operates over the entire greater Houston area and as such relies on people to help shuttle and serve as drop-off and pick-up houses for turtles & tortoises. Our rehab people are quite overloaded making arrangements to get incoming turtles and sending out turtles that have been adopted to their adoptive homes.

If you are able to help with transport, please indicate the areas of Houston you can help shuttle to and from.

If you are able to provide temporary housing of incoming and outgoing GCTTS turtles & tortoises until they are picked up by a shuttle volunteer, please let us know.

We are also looking for someone to manage the "turtle shuttle". This would involve maintaining contact information on the drop-off, pick-up volunteers, and shuttle volunteers, and making all turtle shuttling arrangements.

Children's Program Requests

The LaMarque Library has asked GCTTS to make a presentation about turtles and tortoises on June 8, 2005, from 2 to 3 PM. Wendy Browne will be the speaker and invites anyone wishing to assist or exhibit turtles to let us know.

The Hitchcock Public Library has asked GCTTS to make a presentation about turtles and tortoises on July 5, 6, 7, OR 8 and we are still looking for speakers for the Library. Hitchcock is on Hwy 6, about 5 miles west of I-45 in Galveston county.

Wendy Browne will be the speaker for a children's program at the May S Bruce Public Library in Santa FE, TX on July 20, 10:30 am. Anyone wishing to assist or exhibit turtles to let us know.

The Houston SPCA has asked GCTTS for a speaker for June 9th, June 23rd, and Aug 4th at 11am for children 9-11 years old. The SPCA is located at 900 Portway Dr, just north of Memorial Park. Wendy Browne will be the speaker on June 9th and Julie Young will speak at the Aug 4 event. Anyone wishing to assist or exhibit turtles, let us know. We are still in need of a speaker for the June 23 program.

GCTTS has been invited to make a presentation at the Friendswood Public Library this summer. GCTTS member Bob Smither will be at the Library, 416 South Friendswood Drive, Friendswood, Texas 77546 (281-482-7135), from 1:30 to 2:30PM on June 15, 2005. The Library would like to have an additional turtle presentation during the summer. Times and dates available are every Wednesday in June and July from 1:30-2:30 p.m and the presentation would be directed toward 8-10 year olds. If you are interested in doing another of these talks, or assisting our speaker/exhibiting turtles at the June 15 program please let us know.

If you would like to make any of these presentations or exhibit your turtles, please let us know before at info@gctts.org or the hotline 281-443-3383.

Thanks!

ETHS Meeting and Program at the Houston Zoo!

The next ETHS program and meeting will be held Friday, May 20, The Houston Zoo, Brown Education Center at 7:30 PM. Cayman Blues: The Blue Iguana Recovery Program in Action by Judith Bryja.

Judith Bryja has worked at the Houston Zoo for fourteen years and is the supervisor of the Herpetology Department. She is the studbook keeper for the rare palm-pitvipers of the genus *Bothriechis* and the Institutional Representative for the Komodo Dragon Species Survival Plan and the Terrestrial Invertebrate Taxon Advisory Group. Her other interests include the conservation and captive husbandry of the Fiji Island Banded Iguana and arachnids. This past December and January she spent 3.5 weeks on Grand Cayman in the Cayman Islands working with the Blue Iguana Recovery Program.

While there, she participated in the release and radio tracking of 21 young blue iguanas that were released into a reserve. Other days were spent working at the captive breeding facility which houses approximately 200 animals. She returns to Grand Cayman in early May to look for and track a few purely wild iguanas that have been discovered on private property.

Adoptable Turtle & Tortoise List

Information about those animals available for adoption to our members can now be seen anytime at:

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

The table will be current in about two weeks when post-hibernation evaluations are completed. If available, photos of the animals up for adoption are there as well.

For those of you looking for tortoises and exotics, you should submit an application in advance to be pre-approved as those coming into GCTTS are adopted very quickly. They are usually listed on our web site for no more than 2 days, if that long.

GCTTS has the box turtle adoption application available on our website or via email, and has the application for water turtles and tortoises available via email by request.

New T-Shirts!

GCTTS is pleased to offer our new, high-quality t-shirts! We asking for a donation of \$15 per shirt. The shirts are readily available in any adult size from small up to 2X. Please visit the website for a picture of the shirt and for ordering details. Help support GCTTS by ordering a shirt for every member of your family!

Foster Help Needed!

Adult GCTTS members that are experienced turtle keepers and want to provide much needed help to turtles and tortoises can volunteer to help with our rehabilitation program. We always need help housing rehabs after they have been stabilized. These animals need a period of TLC, good conditions, and

monitoring. Note that these turtles will need to be kept outdoors and isolated from any others you might have.

Outreach Director Position Available!

If you would like to organize the outreach programs for GCTTS, contact info@gctts.org or call our hotline 281-443-3383. This would involve setting up times for those organizations that are requesting our participation, arranging a speaker from our list of speakers, or coordinating booth type events and volunteers for those. GCTTS will help you get started if interested, and provide outreach material and guidelines for the volunteers and speakers.

Something to Remember Biggie By

(Through the eyes of a rehabilitator) By Anita Peddicord GCTTS Rehabilitator

Spring/Summer 2004 was a busy time for me rehabbing ill and injured turtles. In May I received a large beautiful 11 inch long female Red-eared Slider. She came to me through the Houston SPCA. Someone found her on a road, hit by a car. She had several fractures in her shell but the vets office that saw her felt she could be repaired. (Normally I don't name rehabs but I figured this turtle would have to be with me for a long time due to her injuries.)

After Biggie was repaired and back in my possession, she laid 9 eggs in the container that was serving as her hospital room. This was my first experience with having an injured turtle lay eggs. Caring for eggs was not my area of expertise and besides I was very busy caring for all the injured turtles that had come in. An x-ray at the vets office showed she laid them all so none were left. Wanting to give the eggs a chance at hatching and hoping they could do that without my care, I gently picked them up and found a protected place in one of my small turtle pens outside. The dirt was loose and I buried them a little. They were on their own now. I only watered the area a little if I thought they were getting too dry.

Not too many days after she laid her eggs, Biggie died. I was heartbroken because I really thought she was going to make it. She had started eating and was acting almost normal. I've been a wildlife rehabilitator a number of years and I know the rehabbing business can be unpredictable and things don't always turn out like we want. I've seen my share of animals that couldn't survive their injuries but many times it still hurts to lose them.

Weeks passed, I continued checking on the eggs, half wondering if any would hatch. Over 2 months

passed and nothing happened. I was 95% sure the eggs wouldn't hatch. One morning, one week shy of 3 months since Biggie laid her eggs, I checked on them and to my surprise and delight a tiny green face stared back up at me! Oh, how thrilled I was. I carefully dug around and found 4 more green faces! I felt like a new grandmother. I now realized why people get so excited about new baby turtles. Biggie's babies were about the size of quarters and just adorable. I prepared a small container of water for four of the babies but I kept one separate. He was weak and didn't have his eyes open. Days passed and eventually all five of the babies became active and grew strong. Biggie's babies are growing and eating like pigs in their outdoor pond now. They will be released into the wild in Summer 2005. Biggie wasn't with me long but she left me something to remember her by. When I look at her five little ones I think of her and know that all my efforts are worthwhile.

Fun Facts about Turtles and Tortoises

Compiled by Wendy Browne GCTTS Director

- Turtles have been on the earth for more than 200 million years. They evolved before mammals, birds, crocodiles, snakes and lizards.
- Turtles and tortoises belong to the order Chelonia, which are reptiles with ribs, vertebrae and sternum fused to create a shielding shell of bony plates. The turtle's outer shell covering is similar to our fingernails in structure and sheds itself as the animal grows. There are 270 known species.
- Most turtle species have five toes on each limb with a few exceptions including the American Box Turtle of the carolina species that only has four toes, and in some cases, only three.
- Turtles have good hearing, above average eyesight and an excellent sense of smell.
- Turtles live on every continent except Antarctica.
- Texas has 29 native chelonian species, including the Texas tortoise, *Gopherus berlandieri*, which is protected by law. Other native protected species include the Alligator Snapping Turtle, the Big Bend Mud Turtle, and the Loggerhead/Green/Hawksbill/Leatherback and Ridley Sea Turtles.
- The mud and musk turtle species are capable of emitting a strong odor. When alarmed, it responds by secreting this odor from the musk glands that are found on each side of its body.
- The easily recognizable Red-eared Slider is at home in quiet, freshwater systems that have muddy bottoms and abundant aquatic vegetation. They range from Indiana to New Mexico down through Texas to the Gulf of Mexico. They are widely distributed throughout Texas except for the far western region. Thanks to the pet trade, the Red Eared Slider is the most widely distributed species in the world, with established introduced wild populations (that often damage local endemic populations) in many countries.
- A single member of a Galapagos tortoise sub-species still exists at an estimated age of 80 years old. When "Lonesome George" passes away, the Pinta island sub-species will be presumed extinct. Settlers in the early 1880's introduced predatory dogs, hogs and cats which killed the young tortoises and their nests, along with heavy grazing from goats which caused massive starvation among the tortoises which had evolved since the time of dinosaurs to eat the sparse

scrub bushes.

- All turtles and tortoises lay eggs. The eggs develop at a temperature determined by the surrounding soil of their nest. Temperature variations determine the sex of the incubating eggs. In most species, lower temperatures produce males, higher produce females. A female turtle will travel great distances searching for appropriate nesting grounds.
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Overwintering Baby Box Turtles

Julie A. Young GCTTS Member

Although I frequently observe mating behavior among my box and mud turtles, I'm not often rewarded with baby turtles. Perhaps it's the lack of sun hitting the ground in the pen. But more likely it's due to marauding opossums, raccoons, and cats.

This year, however, was different. In the spring, I found several hatchlings, and put them into a separate "baby enclosure," where they hid, ate, soaked, and thrived. They came to know feeding time and the feel of my footsteps, and would pop out to fight over worms and vegetables.

I know that it's best to "let Nature take its course," but I didn't want to leave these babies outside to hibernate over the winter. With the exception of one hatchling who has grown to adulthood, none of my baby turtles has survived the winter. And I didn't want my babies to suffer the fate of another of our members, who had a baby pen specially constructed - and the day after introducing them to the new pen, not a single one of her 25 babies was there! So I decided to try keeping the babies indoors this past winter.

I feared that cold weather and shorter days would signal them to dig in for the winter, so I rounded up the eight babies and brought them indoors in mid-fall, before they could disappear in their hiding places. Soon after this, I happened to be in the pen when other baby turtles were appearing. These were either new hatchlings or babies several months old that had been hiding underground in their nests all winter. Over a period of a week or so, I collected more babies, giving me a grand total of 25!

I am by no means an expert on baby care, but I have had success so far with how I have housed the babies indoors this year. I'd like to share this information, with the caveat that it's good to get as much information as possible, and choose a method that works for you.

I divided the babies up roughly according to size between two plastic containers - the sort that you fold a sweater into and stash under the bed. Trying to re-create the turtle's natural habitat, I added an inch or so of garden soil. (Do not use commercial mixes - they contain insecticides - in fact, don't use soil at all -

see the following.)

Humidity is important to baby turtles and water is necessary, so I added a 4" round lid for water, and misted the soil regularly. A lid half-covering the enclosures helped contain humidity. However, the soil quickly became fouled by the babies, and was impossible to clean. Sanitation is crucial to preventing illness, so out went the soil.

Next I tried paper towels for a substrate. These would hold moisture and could easily be changed. However, these didn't work well, either, as they would become soggy as the babies dumped over their water dish, and the paper got all balled up and made a mess. And it, too, was really stinky!

At the suggestion of another member, I tried using – nothing. I put a bit of water in the plastic containers and set them up so they would be at a slight angle, forming a pool at one end, deep enough to come up about 1/4 of the babies' shells. Because there was nothing for the babies to burrow into or under, I added 3"-4" square plastic flower pots for the babies to hide in. A feeling of security helps reduce stress, which can make the animal vulnerable to illness.

Heat is very important, and necessary to prevent the turtles from thinking it's winter and trying to hibernate. To provide consistent heat, I wrapped heating pads in towels and placed them under the plastic containers. The babies are able to find parts of the enclosure that have warmth to their liking. (Heating pads are low-wattage, so it's OK to operate more than one off the same electrical circuit.)

A photo (light) period that mimics the length of summer days also helps prevent hibernation. A heat lamp was suggested, directed at part of the cage so the babies could bask as they would under the warm summer sun. But this was awkward for my set-up, and I feared that this would dry out the pond end of the cage. Besides, I already had provided heat with the heating pads. So I decided to forego this, and instead relied on the overhead light fixture in the room, turning it on in the morning and off about 8:pm.

This arrangement proved to work very well. The plastic containers are easy to clean, and they can be scrubbed with a brush or disinfected with bleach.

I cleaned the cages and replaced the water every day; sometimes twice a day, depending on what the babies had eaten.

In the beginning, it's crucial to get the babies eating. So, you feed them whatever they will eat, and this usually means protein - worms, bugs, snails, etc. I started with small "dilly" worms from Academy, which were small enough for the babies to catch and eat. But economy won out, and I switched to night crawlers, using a serrated knife to cut them into tiny morsels that fit the babies' mouths. And, as all turtles do, no matter how much food is scattered about the cage, they always want the food that is in the other guy's mouth. So there was a lot of fighting and squabbling over food. It's important to make sure

all babies eat. One member marks her babies, observes them, and keeps careful records of who eats, and what. If some are not getting their share, or appear "puny", they can be secluded to reduce competition.

The babies eat worms, sprinkled with a bit of calcium powder, every other day. On alternate days, they are offered a variety of fruits and vegetables. They don't seem to like sweet potatoes, shredded carrots, or apple, but they love corn, edeme beans, banana, and tomato. Sometimes, it's a matter of one trying a new food, and the others see him eat and decide they want some, too. I turn on the overhead light 30 minutes or so before feeding, and make sure the tanks are reasonably clean before feeding. On worm days, the tanks must be cleaned as soon as the babies finish. With other foods, sometimes cleaning can wait 'til the next day, and sometimes the bowels get moving and necessitate a cleaning right away.

I have had good luck with this set up. I was told that, of my 25 babies, I should expect to loose at least five. Keeping babies is tricky, and interrupting their natural inclination to hibernate is trickier still. And some babies simply are not robust. All of my babies did well, ate, and were active. But after a month or two, it became evident that some were growing and others were not. Some simply became "puny". One day, I came home to find a baby turtle upside down in the water end of the cage, drowned. The next day, another died in the same way. Within a month, three more died. For a while, all went well, then about a month later, four more babies died. Some were clearly "runts", but others had been healthy and eating well. I guess it's just Mother Nature's way.

Now it's nearing spring, and I have prepared the outdoor baby enclosure, securing the top with 1/4" hardware cloth, boards, and bricks. There are plenty of hiding places and several feeding stations and watering holes. Because the babies are accustomed to being kept so warm, I am waiting 'til the ground really warms up before putting them into their pen. In the meantime, on warm days, I put their containers outside where they can get some sun and fresh air.

Side Note

Bob Smither

For the first time in many years, I had baby box turtles born in my outdoor habitat. I found two hatchlings last fall as it was turning cold, along with evidence that the raccoons had found several others.

At the suggestion of a member, I tried essentially what Julie describes above: I took a plastic container a little bigger than a shoebox, put a on inch plastic tube under one end to tilt the container, and added water leaving only the top half of the container dry. I put the top of the container on so that about a quarter of the top was not covered and arranged a reptile basking lamp so that it would shine into the container through the opening. The lamp was controlled by computer to give a 14 hour on, 10 hour off cycle.

Although not a natural habitat, my two hatchlings have prospered and have overwintered in excellent condition. One is larger than the other, showing the natural variation that is expected.

Side Note

Marlaina Barr

When dealing with multiple turtle hatchlings it is very risky to house more than a couple per container. Should more than that be housed together and one is harboring an illness, it will spread to the others like wildfire.

A good UVB/UVA light should be used, such as Reptisun anytime turtles are housed indoors.

Calcium powder should be used sparingly as too much can mineralize the blood vessels and organs - bananas, sweet potatoes and corn are also harmful as they all will effect calcium deficiencies.

Pinkie mice, earthworms, cut up feeder fish, and leafy greens are the foods of choice for baby box turtles, with a very,very small amount of fruit.

The Roots of Turtles

by Beverly Logan GCTTS member

If you have ever lived in the Houston vicinity, or even visited for short time a big notice is the extreme weather conditions Houston has off and on. Just think what a non native land turtle must feel like in this 'cay-os.'

Houston terrain is primarily very colorful with lots of wooded areas, city landscaped medians, and plenty of sunshine. Native Texas turtles love these sunny, warm times basking on rocks with their legs stretched out. Yet, when a cold snap approaches or even a hurricane, "Houston we have a Problem." The tropical rains are 'gushers', that can last three to four days, and even a week at times.

Houston winters are the rains that always come first, followed by the chilly days and nights. This 'Tex mess' just does not mix well in this areas humidity "for sure." 'Texas Northers' are always clashing with this tropical humidity that gives a chill up your spine and the turtles hitting the dirt, you hope, if they are healthy.

Sometimes a Houston turtle is confused to hibernate or not. When ten days of overcast finally clears to a warm 80 degrees, Houston forecasters are still calling us it in the middle of 'dead winter'?

The constant challenges of Houston weather, wildlife, gardening, and turtle keeping, is an all in one effort. This is a somewhat description of an inner city space called my backyard. Houston also has many different migratory birds species in the fall and spring that on occasion are seen visiting the turtle pens bumming off the turtle foods put out. Texas turtle beware: foods left out overnight 'draws' predators.

Now, the enthusiastic thought came to mind to add more landscape timbers to the existing pen, for the turtles to roam naturally,(when it's not raining.) This would hopefully be a longer turtle plant friendly enclosure, in an already appealing landscaped backyard. After much research, I was convinced more added Texas ornamental native plants and trees would look great in the turtle pen, as well benefit migrating birds.

The longer pen idea for better drainage should solve the water flooding problems. Was I wishfully thinking. All of us Houston turtle keepers frequently see 'muddying up' in their turtle's enclosures, and turtles get stuck in the mud 'tight', just like a ranch truck does. Native Texas Turtles living in the Houston area suppose to get used to this?

To an extent pen expansion helps with the water flood line a little lower, but unfortunately the rains cannot drain fast enough in the Houston soil called,'Gumbo'. My answer to the fast flooding water problem is adding mounds of dirt in the center of the turtle pen with native Texas shrubs planted in this same area.

So here I am, still watching the turtles during all these unpleasant weather conditions, worrying about their welfare in the new addition, that I can now see out of the bedroom window as well. The long turtle pen still floods and the 'Northers' don't give up until the end of May. I still witness raccoons, possums, and rats the dog chases out of the yard at night. Adding pesticide free tree leaf mulch for fall hibernation also attracted more insects that helps the 'Texas turtles' bugs relish. Leaf mulch is also a must, for the turtles to keep cool underneath from the hot high heat index Houston is hit with in August. so, I am still adding native plants for shade in the 'Texas heat waves'?

With all the nice looking added Texas native greenery I did however, notice the turtles are now not as visible. Out I went tromping with a stick, poking the ground, searching and trying to find the turtles that, believe me, I thought had vanished. Just how deep do turtles dig down in the ground in the extreme hot or cold times in Houston?

Persisting in my quest, with my observation now moved inside, looking out the window at feeding times. Determined to find out what exactly goes on with a reptile called a Texas native turtle, that vanishes into thin air. To my relief, I notice little dirty covered moving rocks emerge from the edges of

the roots of various plants and bushes, "my turtles!"

For more information on using plants in your turtle pens, see:

<http://gctts.org/WS/WS.php/Public/TurtleFriendlyPlantList>

NEWS RELEASE

The Center for North American Herpetology Lawrence, Kansas <http://www.cnah.org/> 15 March 2005

This is a very useful portal site with many links to herpetological information, including a PDF document archive and a comprehensive list of the herpetological literature.

Announcing the release of Fossil Turtle Newsletter 2005

Fossil Turtle Newsletter provides the fossil turtle research community with an opportunity to exchange information on a yearly basis. The resulting document is intended for the public domain and we encourage that it be distributed freely to whoever may be interested. The first two volumes (2004 and 2005) are available for download at:

http://www.peabody.yale.edu/collections/vp/vp_fossilturtle.html

Turtle Longevity

by Bob Smither GCTTS Director

Have you ever wondered how long turtles live in captivity? There is some interesting information at:

<http://www.pondturtle.com/1turtle.html>

Among other factoids, there are captive red eared sliders listed who have lived over 40 years.

If you are not a GCTTS Member, please join us. See:

http://www.gctts.org/membership_application.pdf

or ask about membership at info@gctts.org or the hotline (281-443-3383).

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