

From the GCTTS Wiki

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Annual East Texas Herp Breeder Sale!

The 15th Annual East Texas Herpetological Society's Breeder Expo and Educational Exhibit will be held Sunday, September 11th at the Crowne Plaza Hotel, located at 12801 Northwest Freeway (Hwy 290) in Houston.

Breeder shows like this one are the best places to obtain captive born reptiles. The Expo will be open to the public from 11 AM until 5 PM.

GCTTS will have an educational booth at this very heavily attended event, and are in need of volunteers. If you can help man our booth or exhibit animals, let us know by August 20th. A good working knowledge of turtles and tortoises will be needed for this event. We are also looking for set-up help at 9 AM. Admission is free for our volunteers.

More information on the conference, expo and sale:

<http://www.eths.org/html/expo2005.htm>

Report Those Box Turtles!

Bob Smither, GCTTS Member

Box turtle populations are on the decline in Texas, and elsewhere. Many of us are old enough to remember when it was unusual to drive through a rural area without seeing at least one of these native Texans. Now it is unusual to see them.

The Box Turtle Partnership of Texas (GCTTS is an active member of the Partnership) is working hard to gather the scientific data needed so that the state of Texas can take action to protect our box turtles. It is feared by many that without some form of protection, our Texas box turtle populations may be doomed.

The box turtle populations are being reduced by many factors, including the continuing chopping up of

box turtle habitats by roads and the continuing collection of turtles from the wild for the pet trade.

Box turtle populations are fragile. Research has demonstrated that once an adult box turtle is displaced from its home range (which may be as small as a few acres) it will seldom settle into a new area, even if the new area is suitable habitat. The displaced turtles tend to continue to wander, often encountering deadly roadways as a result. Experiments with even very large preserves have shown that displaced turtles simply do not prosper.

Box turtles must have a minimum population density in order to sustain a population within a region. The removal of even a single reproducing adult from a population can have devastating consequences.

These issues and more are discussed in the Box Turtle Partnership of Texas's **FAQ** (Frequently Asked Questions).

Quoting from the **Turtle and Tortoise Newsletter**, 2000, 1:19, article by Martha Ann Messinger & George M. Patton:

"Act 81 of the 1999 Session of the Louisiana Legislature prohibits the commercial harvest of Louisiana's box turtle populations. This law, which became effective August 15, 1999, was unanimously passed by both the Louisiana Senate and the House of Representatives. This is an outstanding victory for one of Louisiana's turtles and will have far reaching impact on box turtles in other states."

The Box Turtle Partnership of Texas is gathering information to support a similar law in Texas.

One way that we can help with this effort is to report any sightings of box turtles in the field. This includes any that are found deceased. The GCTTS has an on-line reporting form that has been approved by representatives of the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department. The form is linked from our home page at www.GCTTS.org. Reports entered into our on-line form are e-mailed directly to the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department.

The next time you see a box turtle in the field, report it! You just might be saving these charming critters for your children's generation.

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.

Power Feeding in Chelonians - Just Don't Do It!

Julie Young, GCTTS Member

You may have heard the term "power feeding," and you may have even thought it sounded seductive. Power feeding is rumored to make turtles grow faster - "bigger and better" - and to ready babies for the pet market sooner. Buy power feeding is mostly a power trip for the breeder, and actually causes harm to the animals. We strongly recommend against the practice, and will explain here.

Power feeding is a method used by breeders to force their turtles to grow to market size more rapidly than Nature provides for. It involves feeding much more food than the turtles would normally find in their native habitat, and usually also includes the feeding of much richer foods than are naturally included in a wild turtle's diet. Many people who own turtles as "pets" unknowingly follow the same practice.

Let's look at the most commonly kept turtle, the box turtle. In the wild, box turtles eat what they find when they find it - and that isn't much, and it's not every day. Box turtles eat bugs and worms when they can catch them, carrion when they come across it, and vegetable matter when it's available. This means that they may eat occasional protein-rich foods (insects, worms, meat) occasionally. As for vegetation, they may eat a large amount of a particular food when it's in season, and then eat another type as the seasons change and different plants mature. It's common for box turtles to not eat at all for a day or more, because the food supply simply isn't always predictable or plentiful. This is the natural flow of things, and it's the way a turtle's body was meant to function. Eating in this way will provide the animal with all the nutrients it needs, and allows time for the body to absorb these nutrients and put them to use for growth, to support body functions, to fuel the reproductive system, and to stockpile for the winter

estivation (hibernation) period.)

Power feeding interrupts and sabotages this natural process. When a turtle eats more than its body is naturally designed to process, problems almost always occur. One important problem is the issue of calcium. Turtles need calcium for healthy bone and shell formation, and for smooth operation of internal organs. If a turtle is power fed, its shell will grow faster than normal, and its demand for calcium will exceed its intake. The growing shell must take calcium from somewhere, and the skeletal structure often becomes the source. This means that calcium is leached from the bones in order to feed the growing shell. The result is a weakened skeletal structure, which greatly affects the health and longevity of the animal.

Calcium is also needed for proper functioning of the kidneys and other internal organs, as well as for egg formation. If insufficient calcium is available because it is being mis-directed to the shell, the turtle can become weak and ill and even die. Females can produce eggs that are not strong enough to survive the laying or incubation process.

Power feeding also creates shell deformities, because the shell will grow faster than the underlying structure was designed to support. The scutes of the shell grow and grow, pushing outward from the shell, causing a "pyramiding" effect. This gives an absurdly deformed appearance to the shell, and it's not at all healthy for the turtle.

Turtles and tortoises should be fed a diet as close as possible to what they would find in the wild. If the diet is adequate, there is no need for additional vitamin or mineral supplements. Yes, the animal may grow more slowly, and you won't have the "fun" of watching him eat every day. But he'll ultimately be healthier and stronger, and you'll have the joy of having him with you for a long, long time.

Florida Turtles Suffer Unusually High Cancer Rate

Vero Beach Press Journal

<http://www.chem-tox.com/brevard/main/htm>

Submitted by Anita Peddicord, GCTTS Member

Tumors were once a rare occurrence on Florida turtles, however, today it is more the norm. It was reported that 50-65% of turtles throughout sections of Florida's rivers are being found with tumors over their bodies (note the whitish growths along the front of the turtle's flippers). Although the tumors are believed to result from viral infections, the fact that only turtles in polluted waters have the tumors raises questions to the potential for pesticides and chemicals to weaken the immune systems of the turtles. It is

the immune system that must function properly to constantly remove virus, bacteria and cancer cells as they develop. When the immune system is weakened enough in any living mammal by pesticides, viral and cancer cells can then grow more rapidly, thereby causing greater damage to the organism.

Central Florida River systems are currently running out of time because of the damaging impact of pesticides and chemicals from lawn spray applications, commercial citrus grove run-off and large scale aerial and truck applications of mosquito control pesticides. Fish and other aquatic organisms (especially shrimp) have been reported as experiencing mutations in development and alterations in important behaviors critical to the survival of the organism from very low levels of pesticide run-off exposure.

In an article on the increased number of tumors being found on turtles, appearing in the April 21, 1996 Vero Beach, Press Journal, Florida biologist Liew Ehrhart stated pollution is the "one common thread." Dr. Ehrhart went on to say,

"It only crops up in populations in degraded water. In bays, sounds and lagoons that have runoff, either urban or agricultural. In pristine water, they don't have the disease."

How long will this problem last? Apparently it will continue to grow worse as long as we continue to allow pesticides over our lawns - neighborhoods - and families.

Heat Index problems with Non Native Tortoises

Beverly Logan, GCTTS Member

Those of us that are keepers of tortoises in Houston may not realize the severe problems that non native tortoises species can have. The hot weather.

Some of the unfortunate tortoises that were lifted out of the wild starting in the 70's for the "big" tortoise demands in the reptile pet trade are garden residences in Houston. These "big" desired tortoises came either from tropical rain forest, Savannah areas such as South America, or arid countries where African leopard tortoise or Spurred tortoises were captured.

Then there is the still desired "small" exploited Russian tortoise who lived on the side of cool, hills or mountains that we Houstonians still see in the pet shops from time to time. Russians will dig under landscape timbers just to stay cool in excessive heat, as it was observed by a keeper seeing a descending Russian tortoise from a whole underneath their timbered tortoise pen.

In 1979 there was no clue of what was really going on with the first 10 inch sized "Big" South American tortoise inhabiting my garden. The tortoise was acting very peculiar during the high heat index days not making her usual visible rounds in the garden. Having no trees but only small native plants in my yard for tortoise retreats, it never occurred to me my yard is not fit for a tropical tortoise. It was just too hot.

During that summer of 79' the heat index rocketed daily up to 110 degrees for three weeks. It felt like the kitchen oven door opening up on your face, burning while going outside. The female yellowfoot shut down and wouldn't move, eat or even drink water out of the many water areas I had provided. Red flag! My common sense told me to bring the yellowfoot back into the more shaded tortoise pen to cool off where she started acting much more normal soaking and hydrating in her cooler water saucer.

The other South American redfoot was a juvenile, then living in a shady pen next to the house at this time. It was doing o.k. during this two month hot spell and is not minding the heat, eating etc. So I wonder if this captive tortoise is more acclimated to this area heat being Houston born. ... to ALL turtle keepers who have nonnative tortoises, and even native species of box turtles or water turtles:

It is a must during the high heat index times coming up in July and August to keep your turtles cool. Water can over heat in shallow water turtle ponds without proper shade or water plants. Box turtles and tortoises dehydrate fast on high heat index afternoons in Houston.

A hanging hose water drip system I found helps a tortoise or turtle on higher heat index days during the past heat related weather breakers. An added mud hole is favored by tropical tortoises and box turtles in the garden.

It was just last summer I read South American yellow foot tortoises cannot take temperatures above 90 to 100 degrees. This confirms that Red flag in 79'. The four umbrellas are on call waiting to go up in the backyard for more shade. I added three red bud trees in the garden for more future shade. The 14 inch female yellow foot is pacing around the garden being mischievous knocking over garden decor and rearranging patio furniture. The redfoot grew and has been "big" enough to join the yellowfoot in the garden since 1983, and yes- Heat index we are ready for ya!

Green sea turtle delivered safely back to Hilo harbor

By Rod Thompson the Honolulu Star-Bulletin [rthompson@starbulletin.com?subject=http://starbulletin.com/2005/08/05/](http://starbulletin.com/2005/08/05/)

Submitted by William Montgomery, GCTTS Member

KEAAU, Hawaii

Police and the public helped save an endangered, 150-pound green sea turtle a week ago that had apparently been caught by poachers, the state Department of Land and Natural Resources announced yesterday.

State officers tagged the female turtle and returned her to the sea the day she was found, the department said.

Motorists reported the nearly 3-foot-long reptile by the side of the Keaau Bypass, five miles south of Hilo, at 4:52 a.m. July 28.

The turtle was uninjured, but even if she had avoided speeding cars, the location four miles from the sea probably meant she would have had little chance of survival.

Mike Kawser, a resource management worker at Hawaii Volcanoes National Park, was on his way to work about 4:30 a.m. that day, passing the area of Keaau High School, when two women flagged him down in the pre-dawn darkness.

At first he thought they were joking when they said they had spotted a sea turtle by the roadside, he said.

Neither woman had a cell phone to report their finding, so Kawser called 911. The women drove away while Kawser guarded the turtle until police arrived.

Just down the road, police had been monitoring traffic, parked with their blue lights on, the Department of Land and Natural Resources said.

Officials believe poachers caught the turtle on the lower Puna coastline and were carrying her home when they saw the blue lights and dumped the animal.

Green sea turtles are classified as threatened and are protected by the U.S. Endangered Species Act and state law.

Even dead turtles are protected by the law, said Peter Young, director of the Department of Land and Natural Resources.

Under state law, people can be fined a minimum of \$250 for simply harassing a turtle and up to \$5,000 for killing one.

Department officers John Kahiapo and John Holley placed the turtle in the water at Wailoa boat harbor in Hilo, which gave her just a short swim to Hilo Bay.

"She was healthy, her shell was intact and she was very responsive when we put her on the ramp," Kahiapo said. "She crawled into the water and swam vigorously toward the open ocean."

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