

## **Gulf Coast Turtle and Tortoise Society News Post for February, 2007**

If you are receiving your news post by regular mail and have an email address, please register it with us by sending an email with your name to [info@gctts.org](mailto:info@gctts.org) so we can email your newsletter to you. We never rent, sell, or otherwise disclose e-mail addresses.

### **Join the GCTTS Field Trip to the NOAA Fisheries!**

GCTTS is hosting a field trip for members and their families to the NOAA Fisheries Sea Turtle Center in Galveston Saturday, June 9, 2007. Meet at the Sea Turtle Center a little before 2 p.m. The tour will last about an hour. I-45 to Galveston becomes Broadway, Right on 53rd St. (McDonald's is on the corner), Left onto Ave U, Right onto Sias St. and the NOAA Fisheries entrance.

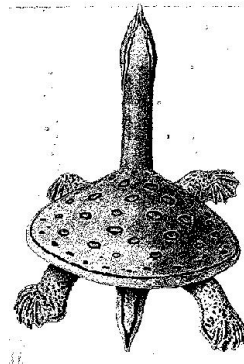


Approximately 600 sea turtles are raised in their facility each year.

Kemp's ridley hatchlings obtained from Mexico and loggerhead hatchlings obtained from Florida are captive-reared for up to two years, used in research, and then released into the Gulf of Mexico. They are also a sea turtle rehabilitation center and sea turtle hospital. This is the only facility of its kind in the United States.

You will get face-to-face with hundreds of live sea turtles with no glass or fence between you and the turtles. Aside from the living exhibits, they also have numerous exhibits on sea turtle eggs, sea turtle tags and tagging techniques, shrimp nets with turtle excluder devices, and shells. Don't forget to bring your camera!

Map: <http://galveston.ssp.nmfs.gov/seaturtles/tours/map700.jpg>



## **GCTTS Program at the Houston Arboretum**

A GCTTS members meeting will be held at the Houston Arboretum and Nature Center on Sunday, October 14, 2007 from 2pm to 4 pm. The meeting format will be an informal turtle and tortoise exhibit followed by a program on hibernation and overwintering of turtles and tortoises. If you would like to bring your animals to display, please let us know by calling the hotline 281-443-3383 (ignore the "emergency only" statement) or dropping us a line at [info@gctts.org](mailto:info@gctts.org) (preferred).

The Houston Arboretum and Nature Center is located at 4501 Woodway, just inside Loop 610, telephone 713-681-8433. Educational material will be available at this program. 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. We would like to have a good selection of native and exotic turtles and tortoises at the program. GCTTS programs are always free and open to the public.

## **Outreach Program Requests**

It doesn't take long to find out how little the general public knows of the issues and husbandry of chelonians. Too many still believe turtles live on lettuce and follow the care advice from their pet store. Why not share some of what you have learned with those in need of this information?

GCTTS has an outreach guide with a sample talk available to assist those interested in speaking at a library, nature center, school or scout program. If you can help, call the hot line and leave your mailing address or e-mail us (preferred). You may disregard the emergency only hotline announcement.

GCTTS will be participating in the Science day for Bales Intermediate School Science Day in Friendswood Thursday, March 8, 2007. Bob Smither will be the speaker. If you would like to assist or exhibit your turtles, let us know.

The Liberty Municipal Library has requested a speaker for their children's summer reading program. GCTTS does not have a volunteer for this event, so let us know if you are interested in presenting this program. The Library is located at 1710 Sam Houston Ave., Liberty, Texas.

A Reptile Open House is being held at Jesse H. Jones Park & Nature Center Saturday and Sunday, August 4 and 5. GCTTS is looking for a speaker to present a talk at 10 a.m. Saturday. The Park is located in North Houston, 20634 Kenswick Drive, Humble, TX.

## **2007 Earth Days and Fairs**

GCTTS participates in many Earth Days and nature fairs each year, and we are in desperate need of volunteers to help man our tables. With booth events like these, there are usually several members at the booth at all times. We have a turtle exhibit, and we talk with those stopping by our table and hand out educational material. These fairs are very heavily attended. Some people volunteer for the entire day, some for half a day, and some for a few hours. Even if you can only help for an hour, your help will allow others to get a much needed break. If you exhibit turtles, we would need the turtles at our table for the entire day. Please let us know by

calling the hot line or sending an e-mail to [info@gctts.org](mailto:info@gctts.org) (preferred) if you can help man our booth or exhibit your turtles. You may disregard the emergency only hotline announcement. These earth days have always been relaxed and fun events. A great way to spend the day outdoors and learn or share information about turtles.

GCTTS will be participating in the following fairs and we are still in need of volunteers:

Nature Fest at Jesse H. Jones Park & Nature Center; Saturday, March 3, 2007, 9 am - 4 p.m.

Far North Houston, 20634 Kenswick Drive, Humble, TX

The Woodlands Earth Day; Saturday, April 14, 2007 9 a.m. - 2 p.m.

The Woodlands High School, 6101 Research Forest Dr, The Woodlands, TX

Brazos Bend State Park Earth Day; Saturday, April 14, 2006 9:00 a.m. - 5:00 p.m.

45 miles southwest of downtown Houston, 21901 F.M. 762, Needville, TX

Bellaire Nature Discovery Center Earth Day; Saturday, April 14, 2006 Time: 10 a.m. - 3 p.m  
7112 Newcastle, Bellaire, TX

Armand Bayou Nature Center Earth Day; Saturday, Apr 21, 10:00am-4:00pm  
8500 Bay Area Blvd, Pasadena, TX

United Space Alliance Earth Day; April date and time to be added when available  
1150 Gemini, Space Center Houston

GCTTS cannot confirm the following fairs until we receive volunteers for them:

Sea Center Texas Nature Day Celebration; Saturday, March 3, 2007, 10:00am-4:00pm  
40 miles south of Houston off Hwy 288 at 300 Medical Drive, Lake Jackson, Texas.  
One of our members in Deer Park will be attending if someone can offer them transportation to and from this event.



Attwater Prairie Chicken National Wildlife Refuge Festival; Saturday & Sunday, April 14 & 15, 2007

60 miles west of Houston near Eagle Lake

North Harris College Earth Fair; Thursday, April 26, Time to be added when available, usually about 10 a.m.-5 p.m.

2700 W.W. Thorne Drive

The Annual Scout Fair; Saturday, April 28, 2007, 11:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.

Reliant Arena

## **ETHS Meeting and Programs at the Houston Zoo**

The East Texas Herpetological Society programs are held each odd numbered month at The Houston Zoo in the Brown Education Center.

For meeting information, see: <http://www.eths.org>

## **Sea Turtle Saturday in Galveston**

HEART (Help Endangered Animals-Ridley Turtles) and Texas A&M University at Galveston will again sponsor Sea Turtle Saturday in Galveston on March 3, 2007.

Beginning at 9 a.m. the public is invited to hear presentations about sea turtle conservation and research focusing on the Kemp's ridley sea turtle. There is no charge for the program.

For more information, see: <http://www.ridleyturtles.org>

## **Adoptable Turtles & Tortoises!**

Information about those animals available for adoption can be seen anytime at:

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

The table will be updated when post-hibernation evaluations are completed. If available, photos of the animals up for adoption are there as well. Turtles available are updated weekly so check back from time to time, as turtles adopt out very quickly after being listed. If you are interested in an uncommon species, submit your adoption application for approval well in advance as those are usually adopted very quickly to those already on the waiting list. Often turtles are adopted to those on the waiting list and are never listed on the adoption page. GCTTS is very busy at the

time turtles are coming out of hibernation, so if you are interested in adopting one of our hibernating turtles, please submit your application now for pre-approval and adoption in the spring.

Currently we have female ornates, Malaysian, gulf coast, hatchling eastern box, russians, peninsular cooter, three-toes, mud and common water turtle hatchlings. We expect some of these to adopt out very quickly.



GCTTS has the adoption application forms available on our website or via email. Those of you that have adopted from us before simply need to update us on the size of the pen you intend for the adoptee, population, species and sexes of the turtles that will share its housing.

### **Articles Anyone?**

GCTTS welcomes articles from our Members for our news posts. If you have any information about our favorite animals, please send it to [info@gctts.org](mailto:info@gctts.org), or mail it to 1227 Whitestone Ln, Houston, TX 77073. Thanks!

### **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 points for turtles & tortoises. Our rehab people are often 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.

The GCTTS protocol for shuttle volunteers is on our website:

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

Currently we have people shuttling that are located in Pearland, Friendswood, Deer Park, and Kingwood. Our destinations for these turtles would be 1960 @ I45 and Deer Park.

## Can you Help with Copies?

We are sending out our Newsletter by e-mail as much as possible, but we still need copies for those that do not have e-mail or prefer hard copies. Copies of husbandry handouts and care related information are an ongoing need as well. If you can donate double sided copies of the Newsletter or single sided copies of handouts, please let us know!

## Where have all the turtles gone?

Read the latest discussion on the decline in the number of turtles in and along rivers, bayous, ponds, lakes and other waterways in Texas, particularly East Texas, in the Houston Chronicle blog:

[http://blogs.chron.com/shannontompkins/2007/02/where\\_have\\_all\\_the\\_turtles\\_gon.html](http://blogs.chron.com/shannontompkins/2007/02/where_have_all_the_turtles_gon.html)

## Featured Turtle for January, 2007 - Pretty Boy

Our featured turtle of the month for January 2006 is Pretty Boy, a *Pseudemys rubriventris*. He was found wandering around a local Nature Center in the Houston area. These turtles are not native to Texas so Pretty Boy was obviously a released pet. The GCTTS tries to educate the public about not releasing non-native turtles. Release of exotic and non-native species can sometimes negatively impact the environment or the native species. Species that are not native to an area may carry organisms that the native species are not immune to and it can work the other way around also. The released non-native may not have immunities to the organisms outside his normal range. This can cause illness and death. Release of pet turtles whether native or not should not be done by the public. Unwanted exotics and non-natives should be turned over to a rescue organization like the Gulf Coast Turtle & Tortoise Society for adoption to knowledgeable caring members. The Gulf Coast Turtle & Tortoise Society has a release program for native water turtles where they are examined and evaluated for a time. The turtle is housed outside in an inground pond to allow its immune system to strengthen. After one year which includes a successful hibernation, the turtle is considered for release into a safe, appropriate body of water.



So... Pretty Boy will be adopted by one of our members with a backyard inground pond. If he does well, he may be considered for release if we can arrange for his transport to his native range. If you are interested in adopting Pretty boy, please see our Adoption Guidelines.

Your donations and memberships help to feed and care for displaced turtles and tortoises like Pretty Boy that still need homes and also for injured wild turtles. We accept PayPal to make giving or joining easy.

## What's in YOUR Turtle Tank?

By GCTTS Member, Anita Peddicord

For those of you who have aquatic turtles that must be wintered over indoors, you may be interested in some opinions I've developed on submersible heaters for aquariums. Since I do rehab, I usually end up with several ill or injured turtles in the fall that must not be allowed to hibernate. Years ago I started off using the popular fully submersible all glass heaters. These are fine for very small turtles but larger, active turtles can break them. Have you ever reached in a tank full of water to attend to something only to quickly withdraw because the heater was cracked and you didn't know it and you got zapped?! Not very fun. Yes, the manufacturers tell us to unplug the heater before putting your hand in the water, but really, how many of us do that?

I've had glass heaters break even when they were protected in the tank. Very frustrating. (I'm also very careful not to remove the heater when still hot.) A couple of years ago I decided to try some inexpensive all stainless steel heaters (ViaAqua) which had an external non-submergible temperature regulator. It took a bit of extra rigging to hang the temperature regulator on the wall outside the tank. I really liked them because setting the temperature dial was very convenient but the scale was very difficult to read even in bright light. Anyway, no more worrying about cracking. One I'm using for the second winter. One lasted only one winter. It died when I set it up to use this fall. It just died and wouldn't come back on. Heaters ought to last more than one year, in my opinion!

Ok, now I'm short TWO heaters because my last glass one cracked (for no reason) around that same time. I like to keep an extra as a backup. (sigh) What do I try now? I decided on the Visi-Therm Stealth. Since I needed it for a 65 gallon tank, I would need a 250 watt one. After doing a bit of price comparing, I purchased a new one on eBay. In no time at all my new sleek black heater arrived. It has an all plastic housing covering aluminum and ceramic internal parts. The temperature dial on the end is easy to read AND set but not so easy that an active or nosy turtle could turn it. (Ever had one of those blasted heaters with the temp dial that needs muscle to turn it?) It even has an auto shut off just in case you forget to unplug it before you do a water change and expose it to air. That's a handy reassurance.

The heater is pretty, unobtrusive and made with a shatterproof plastic. Would it heat and maintain 55 gallons of water in a room kept about 70 degrees during the day and lower at night? This new heater is keeping the water a cozy 79 degrees with no problems. How come the plastic doesn't melt? I don't know but it works great and I don't have to worry about cracking glass!

If you are in the market for a submersible heater, I recommend the Stealth. If you don't know what size to buy, most sellers will tell you the tank size a certain wattage is good for, or you can refer to the GCTTS webpage on heaters:

<http://www.gctts.org/WS/WS.php/Public/SelectingAquariumHeaters>

I've noticed many manufacturers are getting smart and putting a protective cap on the vulnerable end of their all glass heaters. I haven't tried one of these yet but they are probably worth trying in some situations.

One last bit of advice, ALWAYS have a thermometer in your tank. Don't rely on the heater setting to be what you want. If you don't have a thermometer, you may not realize your heater is malfunctioning.

Keep your indoor turtles warm and healthy with a good, safe water heater. Happy turtling!

## **Terrapene ornata luteola - The Stripes are All Wrong!**

By GCTTS Member, Beverly Logan

One of the most usual and interesting box turtles I am fostering is the *Terrapene ornata luteola*.

About nine years ago when my cousin heard I help turtles he mentioned he sees rather large turtles on his ranch located near Van Horn, Texas. Of course this drew my attention because Richard's and his neighbor Roy's ranches are west of Fort Davis in the Chihuahu desert. Both ranches are also near where the desert tortoise's land is bulldozed by the military. Fort Davis is west of the Alpine Chihuahu Desert study Center.



Roy is the still fit rough-it rancher who checks on everything by horseback, or has no choice but to saddle up because trucks get stuck easily in the off road sandy areas of his ranch. Cousin Richard's horse power is his truck that sometimes needs large rocks in the bed for weight to keep from getting stuck on a sometimes too muddy ranch.

With much curiosity over the years I asked if the big turtle he was seeing could by chance be the desert tortoise, walking on some of the many miles of rocky, dry ranch area? I showed Richard a photo of a desert tortoise and then sent it to Roy.

The desert tortoise has not been seen by Roy (still ranching by horseback) on these two ranches to this day. Instead Roy was seeing the desert box turtle known as *luteola*. Roy wanted to give them to me when he learns about my interest in turtle keeping. His interest is waning. So here we go, what do I do with a non-native desert type turtle to my area, humid Houston? A whole different outdoor enclosure is in order with rocks built up off the ground for quick drainage because Houston often floods.

Roy sent the "best looking" ones he has. At first I was amazed as these box turtles are indeed big, but big in a different way than the high domed *terrapene triunguis* (three toed box), and they are quite a bit larger than the smallish *terrapene ornata* (ornate box), their close cousins. These *luteolas* are flat and long with a straight line carapace measurement of 6 to 7 inches.

I was naturally concerned with what they find to eat in the wild. Earthworms offered to these desert animals were just stared at. Habitat research told me they inhabit prairies in treeless plains with gentle rolling grassy country and low brush. I requested photos of cousin Richard's ranch and they showed this to be highly diversified land. I also read that turtles from a terrain in the Trans Pecos area thrive on beetles attracted by cow patties. With Richard's patience I asked for cow patties along with some rocks, sand, and cactus when I was returning from a trip to Van Horn hoping to help this species adjust to our area.

"The best looking" one Roy wanted me to have was the most unusual one. Comments from a GCTTS member was that "the stripes are all wrong." I did some research and found that the 11 to 14 radiating lines are generally yellowish in color. Older luteolas lose their stripes and become paler in color. My reference book never mentions something I observed with the nose on these animals: The piggy snout nose is a definite field mark for me along with the larger shell compared to *Terrepene ornata*.

So far I have been able to foster Roy's turtles with no illness from them being taken away from their native dry climate. Roy has since married and has two children. Richard recently sold his ranch to a land conservation cattleman.

I plan to return these luteola specimens back to their native climate when I have the need to retire from turtle foster care. Yes "the stripes are all wrong" for the terrain of Houston, where it is difficult to find the light sand and light shaded desert areas that the ornata luteola is well camouflaged in.

I have pointed out to Richard and Roy that any turtles taken out of their vast ranching area only cause the populations to decline.

## **ALLIGATOR POINT SEA TURTLE PATROL**

Copyright and Courtesy of Coastal Living magazine

Submitted by GCTTS member, Julie Young

These sea turtle sentinels have a passion for the gentle creatures who amble ashore. Vicki Barnett ushered hundreds of loggerhead hatchlings to the sea and ignited a movement to save turtles in Alligator Point, Florida. She started the turtle-monitoring program there, and when she had to move away, she passed the torch to Bill Wargo and a crew of volunteers.

Vicki's motivation: "Anyone who has ever seen a 350-pound sea turtle crawl ashore at night to dig her nest and deposit her eggs and then, exhausted, struggle to return to the sea, knows the magnificence and determination of the species to survive. It is an incredible experience."

Her legacy: "I really miss working with the turtles, but I know they're in good hands. As luck would have it, Bill retired from [his job with] the Florida Department of Education and now has the time to devote to the protection of our sea turtles."

Bill's approach: "I've been an educator all my life. When people forget to turn off the outside lights or leave chairs or debris on the beach, I have a friendly talk with them. I'm trying to create a sense of ownership in the turtle program."

His best job: "I've watched turtles for years, but never enjoyed anything like this. I have a dedicated group of volunteers who compete with each other to find the most nests. Were excited every time we see one."

His mission: "Saving our precious turtles is all about people. The turtles are a major indicator of the health of our beaches. What we do to harm turtles is also harming us."

## **GCTTS MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION**

GCTTS membership dues include everyone at one address and are:

Regular: \$15.00 / year; Contributing: \$25.00 / year; Sponsoring: \$50.00 / year

Please mail your membership application and dues to:

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

1227 Whitestone Ln

Houston, TX 77073

NAME(S) \_\_\_\_\_

ADDRESS \_\_\_\_\_

CITY \_\_\_\_\_ STATE \_\_\_\_\_ ZIP \_\_\_\_\_

PHONE \_\_\_\_\_ EMAIL \_\_\_\_\_

#### **VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES INCLUDE:**

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

Artwork \_\_\_ Typing \_\_\_ Copying \_\_\_ Writing \_\_\_ Hotline Assistance \_\_\_

Email Assistance \_\_\_ Fostering \_\_\_ Turtle Shuttle \_\_\_ Other \_\_\_\_\_