



Handling Captive Tortoises

Members of the public inquiring about how to handle captive tortoises should be provided with the following information:

- There is no longer any place for the public to drop-off unwanted captive desert tortoises as the Desert Tortoise Conservation Center (DTCC) closed at the end of 2014 as funding for the center's operations ran out. The Lied Animal Shelter is also no longer able to accept tortoises as they were only an in-take center that transferred tortoises to the DTCC, which is now closed. Limited resources previously used to manage "pet" tortoises at the DTCC will now be better spent actively working to conserve and recover wild tortoise populations, our ultimate goal.
- We are requesting the public's assistance in being responsible custodians of captive desert tortoises as they would with any other pet. Persons must find another custodian if they are no longer able to care for or no longer want their pet tortoise. Tortoises that are legally held can be easily transferred to another custodian by having the new custodian complete the "Register-to-Legally-Adopt" (RLAP) form by clicking on the "**Register my tortoise**" tab on Tortoise Group's website at www.tortoisegroup.org.
- Tortoise Group's website also has additional tools to assist the public including a message board or "exchange site" on their website to help connect people looking to transfer their tortoise to another custodian with people looking to adopt a tortoise found by clicking on the "**Re-Home my tortoise**" tab at www.tortoisegroup.org.
- *Don't dump your tortoise.* Releasing pet tortoises to the wild is not only illegal, it can be a death sentence if the tortoise is unable to find adequate water, food, and shelter in an unfamiliar area and could spread disease to the wild tortoise population.
- *Leave wild tortoises wild.* It is illegal to touch, disturb, harass, harm, poach, or bother a tortoise in any way. Leave a wild tortoise alone. However, if you see a wild desert tortoise at risk of injury on a road and it is safe for you to stop, you can slowly approach the tortoise, gently pick it up, hold it level, and move it several yards beyond the side of the road in the direction the tortoise was heading.
- *Stop backyard breeding.* Breeding of captive (pet) desert tortoises is producing scores of unwanted baby tortoises and does not help the species recover in the wild. The practice **must** be stopped.
 - Persons in possession of multiple tortoises are being asked to stop backyard breeding by using one of the following options. Separate male and female tortoises, or consider having their tortoises sterilized. Several local veterinarians now offer the procedure as part of their private practice and can be found on the Tortoise Group's website at www.tortoisegroup.org. An interagency workgroup is currently developing plans to offer sterilization clinics for the public summer 2015 targeting custodians holding multiple tortoises to help stop backyard breeding.