

Pear Pearls

Volume 8 Issue 2

www.pearassoc.org

Fall 2011



Four Gazebos On Trail System

Pictured are the four gazebos located in PEAR Park. Above are the newest additions placed on what we refer to as the Front 50. That's the section designed for Recreation and accessible from Route 27. The gazebo on the top left is at the Trail Head, just a short distance from the parking area. The gazebo on the top right is at the Ball Field and adjacent to the fitness equipment on the Trail. Both gazebos have picnic tables and outdoor grills. Use of these for gatherings must be arranged with the Parks and Trails Department at (352) 253-4950.

The gazebos at the bottom have been here for several years. They must be accessed from the University Avenue entrance – don't miss the beautiful display of plants and flowers at the entrance. This is the Reserve section of PEAR Park. The bottom left we call Pear Mountain. Notice the handicap parking and access – no steps. On the bottom right is the gazebo centered in our Demonstration Area.

The Perimeter Trail at PEAR Park is approximately three miles – a pleasant hike with many places to stop and rest a while. All gazebos are near the Trail. Or you may choose to visit any one of these gazebos – a treat any time.



The Gopher Tortoise – A Life History

Patricia Sawyer Ashton & Ray E. Ashton, Jr.
Pineapple Press – Sarasota, FL 2004

In 1997 this couple established a 100 acre upland habitat – Finca de la Tortuga-Ashton Preserve. As field biologists they also founded the Ashton Biodiversity Research and Preservation Institute and the Gopher Tortoise Conservation Initiative.

The gopher tortoise's shell is part of its body, not its home. The shell is made of bone. Their backbone and ribs are flattened and fused to the body shell which is covered with scutes.

The burrow is the tortoise's home. Tortoises, like most reptiles, are ectothermic (coldblooded). Basking in the sun is necessary to raise the body temperature for the healthy function of its body systems.

The burrow, the breeding and feeding area constitute the home range of the tortoise. A tortoise may move to nearby burrows. During the mating the male tortoise will visit the female tortoise in their burrow. The burrow is an underground shelter. The deeper burrows maintain temperatures above 55 degrees in winter and below 80 degrees in summer. Burrows are found in dry, sandy, upland and coastal areas in the southeastern U.S.

Burrows consist of an apron, a mouth, a tunnel, and an end chamber. The visible aprons vary depending on the surrounding soils. Burrows have only one mouth, there is no escape hatch or back door.

The tortoise chooses his burrow based on the mouth being in the sun and in soil that drains well – the water level being at least 2 feet below the surface. They seem to like to place their burrows at the base of fences, logs, rocks, or palmettos, or high areas like roadsides.

The tortoise digs with his front feet, one side at a time. The developing tunnel slopes downward at an angle of 3 feet of depth for every 9 feet in length. The tortoise will take two or three days to complete a burrow. Burrows vary from 3 to 52 feet and usually end at the ground water table. Some go as deep as 22 feet below the ground surface. The burrows go to the right or left depending on whether the tortoise is right-handed or left-handed.

The mouth of the tortoise burrow is shaped like the tortoise and large enough to allow the tortoise to turn around anywhere in the burrow. Many other animals use the tortoise burrows when they are gone. Armadillos, gray foxes, coyotes, skunks, burrowing owls and – eek – snakes are some who seek the cooler temperatures and cleaned burrow. Biologists determine the projected number of tortoises using this formula: number of active + inactive burrows times .67 = the projected number of tortoises. This is really just an educated guess.

Other animals make use of the tortoise burrow – frogs, lizards, birds, rodents to name a few. Insects and spiders too. Snakes like burrows as they find their food supply there – mice, frogs, toads, lizards. Over 400 species have been identified as taking refuge in the tortoise burrow. Those classi-

fied as obligate species only live in tortoise burrows. This fact established the gopher tortoise as a keystone species. For this reason, gopher tortoises and their burrows are protected by law.

Research has shown that only 4% of over 5,000 tortoise burrows have snakes in them, while 70% have gopher crickets in them.

Gopher tortoises spend only 1 to 2 hours every 2 or 3 days outside the burrow. The home range of the gopher tortoise is 1/3 to 2 acres. The daily life cycle of a tortoise is determined by the need to maintain body temperature within the range of 55 to 95 degrees. They need water – yes, they can swim. They will go to ponds or marshes for water. Tortoises eat a lot of bulk, have favorite plants and during the active growing season will forage 2 or 3 times a day for 20 minutes to 2 hours – after which they return to their burrow to cool down and digest their food.

Tortoises are known to eat 300 to 400 different species of plants. Good forage contains plenty of broad-leafed grasses, wiregrasses with open space, widely spaced trees, good drainage, some fruiting bushes/trees, and herbaceous weeds – wildflowers that produce seeds and fruits eaten by many birds and insects and gopher tortoises. Tortoises do not have teeth. They have a bony beak that cuts plants like scissors.

It requires lots of patience to find and photograph gopher tortoises eating. They feel vibrations in the ground and hear very low frequency sounds, which travel long distances. They know you are coming before you see them.

The female will dig a nest 15 to 30 days after mating, usually in or near the burrow apron. The 5 to 7 eggs deposited there usually hatch in 80 to 100 days. The hatchling tortoises may take refuge in inactive adult burrows. They become sexually mature and able to reproduce at about 18 –25 years old and then may live 60 years or more. Mating is accomplished as the male mounts the female from behind, inserting his long bluish penis in her cloaca under her tail. The male may make low, audible sounds during the 10-20 minute copulation. If the female is unreceptive, she may lift up and push the male over on his back – a precarious position. Photographing this wonder of nature requires much patience and lots of luck.

Agencies to contact for further information:
Gopher Tortoise Conservation Initiative
Ashton Biodiversity Research and Preservation Institute, Inc.
14260 W. Newberry Rd. # 331
Newberry, FL 32669
Tortfarm2@aol.com www.ashtonbiodiversity.org

Gopher Tortoise Council
c/o The Florida Museum of Natural History
P.O. Box 117800
University of Florida
Gainesville, FL 32611
www.gophertortoisecouncil.org

Reviewed by George Wolf Dec 2010

Palatlahaha Environmental & Agricultural Reserve Association, Inc.

Officers

| | | |
|----------------|---------------|----------|
| President | Mary Remer | 365-0964 |
| Vice President | Jean Morse | 360-9447 |
| Secretary | Linda Ballard | 787-5636 |
| Corr Sec | Sally Schulte | 728-1446 |
| Treasurer | Peter Moeller | 787-6230 |

Standing Committees

| | | |
|------------------------|---------------------|----------|
| Budget and Finance | Gary Salzman | 323-6138 |
| | George Wolf | 728-8956 |
| Membership & Publicity | George Wolf | 728-8956 |
| Nominating | Ed Schlachtenhaufen | 728-4214 |
| | Gene Bouley | 314-9335 |
| | Peg Urban | 326-3868 |
| Volunteers | Ed Schlachtenhaufen | 728-4214 |

Other Committees

| | | |
|-----------------------------|---------------------|----------|
| Xeriscape Garden | Jean Morse | 360-9447 |
| Demonstration Garden | Peg Urban | 326-3868 |
| Wildflowers | Peter Moeller | 787-6230 |
| Mowing & Plowing | Hal Urban | 326-3868 |
| Woodland Restoration | Mary Remer | 365-0964 |
| | Peg Urban | 326-3868 |
| River & Perimeter Trails | Gene Bouley | 314-9335 |
| | Ed Schlachtenhaufen | 728-4214 |
| Canoe Launch and River | Gene Bouley | 314-9335 |
| | Ed Schlachtenhaufen | 728-4214 |
| Exercise Trail, Ball Fields | Tom Eicher – | |
| | Lake Parks & Trails | |
| Special Events | Tom Eicher | 253-4950 |
| Dog Park Liaison | Linda Ballard | 787-5636 |
| Birds & Bat Houses | Bob Putman | 326-2045 |
| Heritage Memorial Grove | Temporarily Vacant | |
| Grape Arbor | Ed Schlachtenhaufen | 728-4214 |
| | Duane Hall | 728-5754 |
| Science and Nature Center | Gene Bouley | 314-9335 |
| Meadows Restoration | Peter Moeller | 787-6230 |
| Community Gardens | Gary Salzman | 323-6138 |
| | Ed Schlachtenhaufen | 728-4214 |
| Historian | Bob Putman | 326-2045 |
| Gopher Tortoise | Lynn McGann | 326-4146 |

Membership

The Pear Association funds its projects through grants, memberships and donations. The major activity of restoration is nearly complete, leaving us ineligible for grants – which have become a rare benefit in our present economy. Still we are engaged in maintenance of trees and plants and much weeding. We use power equipment and must supply gas and oil and repairs.

Our membership campaign for 2012 is now underway. If you are joining for the first time, we establish your membership on receipt of your application and donation. Your membership is needed if our efforts are to continue. Thank you.

**Pear Assoc. Inc.
Membership/Renewal
Application**

Name _____

Mailing Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Phone _____

Email _____

Membership Type _____ Enclosed _____

Individual \$ 10 \$ _____

Family \$ 15 \$ _____

Lifetime \$100 \$ _____

Family Lifetime \$150 \$ _____

Supporting Organization \$ 40 \$ _____

Special Interests and Concerns:

Skills and talents we can use:

In signing this document I affirm that I am in agreement with the mission of the PEAR Association.

Signed _____ Date _____

New Members of Pear Assoc.

- | | |
|---------------------|-----------------------|
| Dr. P. Coniglio | Bonnie and Jim Keyser |
| Jennie Macaionia | Kelly Myers |
| Steve & Jane Sewell | Megan Webster |
| Woof Gang Bakery | |

Pear Pearls
Pear Association Inc
P O Box 424
Okahumpka FL 34762



Award of Excellence

At the Annual Florida Native Plant Society conference in Maitland, May 18-22, Pear Association was presented with an Award of Excellence in the Ecosystem Restoration category of landscape design for the gardens surrounding the Butterfly Pavilion at Pear Park.

This garden is a result of co-operative planning by Dr. Ronald Plakke of the Pear Association and Lake County Parks and Trails staff, who shared the award with us. The hard work of planting and caring for the gardens was performed by the Tuesday morning volunteers at the park.

On August 23rd, 2011, the Lake County Commissioners with the Public Resources and Parks and Trails Departments recognized our Association and expressed their appreciation for achieving this award and all that we do at PEAR Park.

The plants have done well over the summer and the beautiful pavilion, benches and circular walkways that have been installed by the county, make quite a peaceful setting for viewing the surrounding gardens. We hope that you take the time to visit them soon. **Peg Urban**

Heritage Memorial Grove

The Memorial Grove at PEAR, with about a dozen trees and memorial bricks, is really taking shape. The trees are all healthy and growing. Come and take a look at them yourself. If you would like to purchase an engraved brick to honor or memorialize someone, please contact Mary at 352-365-0934. We have a lot more space in which to plant the trees.

This newsletter is mailed to our members and friends twice yearly. You may elect to receive our publication by e-mail. To do this contact our circulation manager at

www.vonflow43@aol.com

Thank you,
George Wolf—Editor

Editorial

This past summer the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service removed the gopher tortoise as a federally listed threatened species. Concern among environmentalists for the continued protection of this endangered animal brought a public notice from the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission that the gopher tortoise and its burrow is a threatened species and protected by state law.

This is encouraging news. At Pear Park the gopher tortoise is given special respect. The burrows are marked to avoid inadvertent destruction by mowing or other vehicles. Lynn McGann has given many hours using a GPS to mark locations and place markers around burrows. This is but one of many tasks carried on by the Pear Association volunteers. We don't often see the gopher tortoise, but we know they are in our park and surrounding areas.

Annual Meeting

Notice is hereby given of the Annual Meeting of the Pear Association, Inc, a 501c3 non-profit corporation in the state of Florida. This meeting takes place on Monday, December 19, 2011 at 2:00 PM in the Administration Building in PEAR Park, University Avenue, Leesburg, FL. All members are encouraged to attend. Friends and guests are welcome to this open meeting

The budget for 2012 will be approved, officers and directors elected, and reports filed by all committees. Anyone with an interest in the future of PEAR Park does well to attend this important event.