

Happenings at The Nature Center



BABY GOPHER TORTOISE RESCUE - BE ALERT FOR THESE LITTLE GUYS!

Contributed by Linda Day

A TGO resident was going about his day refilling dirt into little holes dug by wildlife residents the previous evening. As he covered up one small hole, he discovered something moving - it was a 1.5 inch baby Gopher Tortoise actively shoveling sand from a shallow hole with its front feet! The baby tortoise was actually making his first burrow. Unfortunately it was right along Plantation Drive, and wouldn't likely survive.

The resident wisely contacted Betty Salter, who immediately recognized it as a Gopher Tortoise hatchling. She contacted Dr. Bob Taylor, our resident Gopher Tortoise expert. Gopher Tortoises are protected as a Threatened Species by the State of Florida and can only be handled by trained experts. Bob holds a permit from the state and works in cooperation with FWC and other conservation organizations to save these tortoises. We are fortunate to have him living in our community! Bob carefully placed him in a safe area to begin his first burrow.

Bob explained that hatchling season is between September and November. The young will spend their first winter in the burrow with an adult, and now this baby was heading out to dig his first burrow, and establishing his first territory for his lifespan of 50-75 years.

The baby was numbered (86!) and will be tracked for the rest of its life in Bob's extensive data base of TGO Gopher Tortoises. Bob identifies each Gopher Tortoise in TGO with a number placed on the back of the shell with safe paint.

Each turtle is weighed, measured and photographed with detailed notes. There are a dozen or so TGO residents whom Bob has enlisted to be Gopher Tortoise Scouts. These scouts attend training and orientation classes with him. When they find a Gopher Tortoise, the scout reports the geopositioning and sends photographs and other information to Bob so the tortoise can be tracked. The scouts never touch the tortoise, and it cannot be emphasized enough that these are a threatened and protected species and touching or handling them is illegal.

Bob does say, however, if you see a turtle walking along the road, you may touch it only for safety reasons, placing the turtle in a safe place in the direction it was heading.



#86! This baby Gopher Tortoise was saved by an alert TGO resident. The young tortoise was working hard to dig his very first burrow right along Plantation Drive. Bob Taylor was contacted to move the baby to a safe location. As you can see, he is so tiny! Be careful when driving or walking - if you see something which looks like a tiny stone, it could be an endangered baby Gopher Tortoise.

Photos of baby tortoise by Dr. Bob Taylor



Dr. Bob Taylor, TGO resident, received his PhD in Zoology from the University of Florida. His dissertation was on the Reproductive Biology of the Gopher Tortoise.

Photo by Sally Fisher

