



Protecting the Desert Tortoise

Mojave National Preserve, Ivanpah Desert Tortoise Research Facility

Mark Peaden, Field Technician, University of California, Davis

There's been hundreds and thousands of people go through the Mojave National Preserve, and I don't think they realize how often they pass by a tortoise on the road and how difficult they are just to see, even if you're walking through.

Brian Todd, Assistant Professor, University of California, Davis

Because the desert tortoise is a threatened species, there's a lot of interest in looking at measures to try to improve populations.

Peter Bergeron, Environmental Project Manager, Chevron

This project that I'm working on now, we removed roughly 15 miles of pipeline, a majority of that that crossed critical desert tortoise habitat. Part of our mitigation was to actually build a structure that the researchers could use to understand what's actually happening to this species of animal.

Grace Lee, Executive Director, National Park Trust

The National Parks Service will be using this facility with the researchers at University of California, Davis, and University of Georgia. And this facility and the land that it's on will become part of the park service land, and so that will allow them to chronicle the life of the tortoise.

Melia Nafus, Doctoral Candidate, University of California, Davis

Headstarting is a process where you protect juvenile and new animals from predation and other hardships that they would experience in the wild before you release them.

Brian Todd

When the nests start to hatch, we take all of the hatchlings inside. We weigh them. We measure them. We mark them. That's where we do a lot of the work to categorize and catalog and keep track of each one of the individual animals that we're working with before we either release them into these protected enclosures or put radio transmitters on them and then release them outdoors.

Melia Nafus

This facility actually provides a great opportunity to have a base where you can come back to. You can bring the animals back, process them indoors in climate-controlled situations. We have a nice place that's out of the wind.

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Peter Bergeron

Essentially, this facility was built as part of Chevron's commitment to environmental stewardship. We designed it to be very energy-efficient. It's probably 95-plus percent off the grid.

Melia Nafus

You don't really think of reptiles as being overly intelligent animals. And so it's so striking when these animals see you, and they lock their eyes on you, and they come up and they want to know what you are and what you're doing in their environment.

Mark Peaden

Just being able to survive multiple years in harsh conditions—being able to go a year without water, multiple years without food. And the fact that they can do this and still survive, that's pretty incredible to me.

Brian Todd

Scientists value biodiversity very often for its own sake—how long it takes for these communities to evolve and be shaped by all the different species that are interacting. And every time we lose one of those species, there's a risk that something greater is happening to the environment, that we're seeing an overall degradation.

Grace Lee

With all of the challenges that the tortoise face, I think it's going to be really important that there is a champion of their survival, and that's what the Mojave Preserve will be able to do at this facility.