

**American Tortoise Rescue “Shellebrates”**

**World Turtle Day® on May 23, 2019**

**2019 Theme is “Adopt, Don’t Shop”**

**April 15, 2019 - Malibu, CA - American Tortoise Rescue (ATR)**, a nonprofit organization established in 1990 for the protection of all species of tortoise and turtle, is “shellebrating” its 19th annual **World Turtle Day®** on May 23, 2019.

ATR created and launched World Turtle Day to increase respect for and knowledge of one of the world’s oldest creatures. Now observed around the globe, turtle and tortoise lovers are taking “shellfies” and holding shellebrations in the U.S., Canada, Pakistan, Borneo, India, Australia, the UK, Greece and many other countries. These gentle animals survived 200 million years, yet they are rapidly disappearing as a result of smuggling, the exotic food industry, habitat destruction, climate change and the cruel pet trade. Biologists and other experts predict the disappearance of turtles and tortoises in the wild within the next 50 years.

“We are more grateful than ever this year to shellebrate. We lost our home and the turtle hospital in the Woolsey fire in Malibu, one of the worst wildfires in history,” said Susan Tellem, RN, BSN, co-founder of ATR with her husband Marshall Thompson. “We were able to evacuate with all 35 turtles and tortoises in our hospital, but those in the rescue itself were hibernating and hidden. Fortunately, the 15 pond turtles and more than 50 other rescues sheltered in place in fireproof housing that my husband built years ago.” Tellem said the intense heat melted everything and destroyed plants and trees, but the hibernating turtles survived. “I think it was a miracle. We believe it was the St. Francis statue in the front yard that kept the animals safe. The statue was the only thing left on the home site.” To help rebuild the hospital and the rescue itself, visit <https://www.gofundme.com/turtlestrong-malibu-fire-relief>

“Our theme this year is *Adopt, Don’t Shop*,” Tellem said. “There are rescues throughout the globe that help place turtles and tortoises into forever homes, most at no cost. (See partial list here: <http://www.tortoise.com/turtle-rescue-centers-in-usa.html)>.” She added, “You can help by not purchasing a turtle from a pet store, online or at a swap meet. Sadly, most of these animals are taken illegally out of the wild or are victims of international smuggling.” Tellem also suggests reporting tiny turtles less than four inches sold at pet stores, by street vendors or used as prizes at carnivals and other events to government wildlife agencies. Their sale has been illegal since 1974. Most die after purchase years before they should.

Some of the highlights to help make your World Turtle Day special include:

* Everyone can join the party at home, at a pub or at work. ATR created a World Turtle Day Party Pack that can be accessed for free here <http://bit.ly/1YwebJR>
* Like the World Turtle Day page on Facebook and join thousands of fans who are enjoying shellfies, photo contests and gifts in honor of World Turtle Day.
* Follow @WorldTurtleDay on Twitter. Every year thousands of people tweet #worldturtleday to spread the good word about turtles.
* Join [www.instagram.com/worldturtleday](http://www.instagram.com/worldturtleday)
* Follow and share videos at [www.youtube.com/americantortrescue](http://www.youtube.com/americantortrescue)

**About ATR**

American Tortoise Rescue is a nonprofit founded in 1990 for the protection of all species of turtles and tortoises. We have rescued more than 4,000 since inception. Foundlings that cannot be adopted because of ill health remain in the care of ATR for the remainder of their lives. ATR acts as a clearinghouse for information about turtle care. We work to abolish “live market” slaughter of turtles in the US, the sale of reptiles on sites like craigslist.com and the cruel importation and exploitation of a variety of species.

**Media Contact Information**

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