

MALIBU *Surfside* NEWS



MALIBU MOUNTS—Although horses and other large livestock are not as prevalent as they once were throughout Malibu, equestrian properties, especially those in the western confines of the community and in the mountains, have the open space and the zoning to allow these symbols of America’s frontier heritage to even share space with human inhabitants whose notion of pioneer life is mainly to be found in the movies. MSN/Frank Lamonea

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Local Photographer Provides Haven for Homeless Turtles and Koi

High on a hill overlooking Zuma Beach, homeowner Doug Busch and his wife Lori have created a state-of-the-art haven that houses more than 60 rescued turtles and 60 koi at his Trancas Canyon home.

The 40,000-gallon pond was originally designed as a fire break and koi pond. Busch said, "I like water. The last fire that came through here, when it hit that flat over there, the flames rose 150 feet in the air," he said "The pool blocks the side of the hill where the house is and the pond blocks the studio where all my photo negatives are."

Busch, who is a photographer and architect, said he initially purchased a couple of turtles and after encountering some problems, he contacted local



FINE LIVING—An overview of Busch's pond shows the islands where the turtles can sun as well as tall reeds which provide protection.

surpasses their prior situation. The pond is about two feet deep and contains about 32 varieties of water plants, many of which provide protection from preda-

Under the islands are numerous shelters, where the turtles can hide from predators as well as rest. The pond even continues under Busch's expansive studio providing a dark habitat for the mud turtles.

Keeping the habitat up to par requires a lot of work. "The ponds require a ton of maintenance," says Busch. "We have a full time man that does nothing but maintain the ponds. He has to put in bacteria and enzymes to keep a balance, backwash the filters and make sure the algae is cleaned out."

The pond is home to several species of turtles, including yellow sliders, soft shells, the aforementioned mud turtles and probably, the most well known species, painted reds—a favorite of youngsters many years ago, that was a popular prize at children's birthday parties. "You used to be able to buy them in pet stores, but that's illegal now because they aren't indigenous to the area," Busch said.

Busch says that there is

that need to be "re-homed" especially in this economy with the alarming rate of foreclosures. But, he says that another reason for giving them up is that people aren't always aware of the commitment that ensues withowning a turtle.

"People will call and say 'I bought this turtle and it was the size of a quarter [in the case of the painted reds] now its four feet and I need to get rid of it because I can't house it,' or they lost their job or live in an apartment, so we take them." He said they also don't realize that turtles can live for several decades.

The rescued turtles come from all over. The morning of this interview, a volunteer had brought in two yellow sliders after receiving a call from the owner that he could no longer keep them and Busch said that the following week he would be receiving two turtles from New York because they were getting too big for the owner's apartment. "It's really easy to send them—we have them fed-exed to us all the

"They are wrapped in wet newspaper and come in Styrofoam containers. Because of their slow metabolism, they are fine for one or two days."

Busch says that for many people, their turtles are beloved pets and parting with them can be a heart-breaking experience. He recalls one woman who, after releasing her pet, climbed into the pond and followed it to make sure that it had adjusted to its surroundings.

Busch understands the attachment people feel for their turtles, explaining that he and his wife have their own favorites. For Lori, it's Rambo, "an aggressive soft shell." For Busch, his heart belongs to Teresa Heinz Kerry, the grand

takes a break with Busch and his assistants, where she is given treats.

Busch says that his pond can hold about 100 koi and 100 turtles, so he is already making plans to expand, but would like people to know that the residents of the turtle rescue are available for adoption.

"We'll adopt them out to people but we don't get a lot of calls," he said. "They can have anything up to eight inches, which is awfully big, because you need to have a pond and they need to be protected against raccoons. The little ones are really cool and you can put them in tanks. We actually have tanks we can give people, because many times they are brought to us in tanks." When asked about what is



NEW BEGINNING—Doug Busch prepares to release one of the yellow sliders (inset) that were brought to Trancas Turtle Rescue earlier in the day. The pond can hold 100 koi and 100 turtles. When the populations exceed those numbers, he will expand the habitat.

MSN Photos/Robby Mazza

resident Susan Tellem, who with her husband Marshall Thompson founded and runs American Tortoise Rescue who discouraged him from purchasing any more turtles. "She said, 'I'll give you turtles,' and the next thing I knew, we had a turtle rescue site, trancasturtle-rescue.com."

With that, Busch immersed himself in turtles, building a habitat that is eco-friendly and is more of a resort, where the turtles and the koi coexist peacefully in a habitat that far

tors as well as being aesthetically pleasing.

Complete with aerators, waterfalls and protective fencing and electric fencing, the habitat has several islands—including "Veggie Island" and "Sunshine Island" where the turtles can get out of the water and sun themselves. "They need to dry themselves out or they will die from bacteria," said Busch. He said that the length of time a turtle suns varies; some will sit out for a few hours and some, all day.



BREAK TIME—A turtle climbs onto one of several islands where it can dry out its shell.

no end of koi and turtles time," laughed Busch.



PEACEFUL COEXISTENCE—A painted red swims with colorful koi fish. Although the rescue has provided a haven for koi and turtles, it is also a learning experience for Busch. "For instance," he asked, "Did you know that turtles aren't able to walk backwards?"

dame of the pond, a 30-year-old yellow slider that

required for caring for an adopted turtle, Busch said



NESTING—A turtle lays eggs by the perimeter of the pond. The fencing around the area is topped by an electric wire to keep predators out.

was sent to the rescue from Florida after being found with a fish hook in her mouth. "She was the ninth resident at the rescue. She and Rambo fight," said Busch "So she went to live on the other side of the pond for a while." In fact, Teresa even comes into the studio occasionally and

the work is considerably less than what he incurs caring for many, "you change the water, you feed them, keep the tank clean and provide them with an area where they can dry out."

For more information, visit www.trancasturtle-rescue.com.

BY ROBBY MAZZA