

NCPARC RIMM Meeting: Wednesday, August 30, 2006

Chair

Mike Dorcas- Davidson College

Participants

Chuck Bryan- Fort Bragg

Kendrick Weeks- North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission

Sarah Cross- North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission

Steve Price- Davidson College

Alvin Braswell- North Carolina Museum of Natural Sciences

Joe Pechmann- Western Carolina University

Charles Lawson- Western Carolina University

Veronica Barnes- North Carolina Department of Transportation

Ed Corey- North Carolina State Parks

Jeff Beane- North Carolina Museum of Natural Sciences

Rusty Gaul- East Carolina State University

Brian Ball- Fort Bragg

Ann Somers- University of North Carolina at Greensboro

John Groves- North Carolina Zoological Park

Jeff Hall- Weyerhaeuser's Cool Springs Environmental Center

Zach Orr- Randolph Rattlesnake Refuge & Research

Call to order: 1:00 pm

Introductions

First, address agenda and assignments

1. Herpetologist Registry

MD: Has everyone registered online?

Some participants could not register.

SC: It wouldn't work for me but I haven't tried in about three weeks.

AB: I thought I was registered but I went and checked and I wasn't there. So I registered again, but I didn't go back and look to see if it worked.

JB: Same thing happened to me.

MD: OK. So, here is what I request of everybody because I hadn't heard anything in at least three weeks about anybody having any problems. And, if I don't hear anything...it seems to work fine on our end. OK, let me back up and explain the program for any newcomers. The Herpetology Registry is a way to facilitate communication and collaboration for anyone doing research on amphibians and reptiles in North Carolina.

The idea is that you put your contact information in there and interests, places in the state you work and so forth. And, you can search the database, you don't have to be registered to search it. We assumed when we built this thing that if anyone really wanted to find out what your contact information, they could probably go online and find your C.V. or whatever. But, you can search the registry and edit your information and I would ask everyone to register and email me if you have any problems.

JH: We discussed at the last E&O meeting that we would like to have the Outreach Registry to be similar to the Herpetologist Registry. Someone suggested that your form could be modified to include that also so people could fill out one form to be added to both lists. Is that possible? Right now it just sends an email to Sarah and its not generating easily accessible information like the Herpetologist Registry. Many of the same people would be on both lists.

MD: Maybe, I don't know. I think the thing to do may be to copy it and make it a separate form because I am not sure we can mesh it altogether.

EC: My thoughts were that maybe there could be a check box on the Herpetologist Registry that would indicate you were also an educator and would allow you to fill in more information.

MD: I understand that but this was initially supposed to be simple and it has already gotten a lot more complicated. The person who does the programming does it in his spare time. But, certainly if we add a field that says Education & Outreach, that would be simple.

JH: I would like people to be able to access the list of educators on the web.

EC: Can't you have two check boxes and two columns that will let you fill out whatever is relevant on the form.

MD: It depends on what other stuff you collect...

SC: The other stuff we collect....What I am thinking here Jeff is that some of people who have signed up work at a nature center. They aren't herpetologists and they don't do research but they might be able to do programs with some snakes they have. One thing I have been asking them all is where are you located? how far are you willing to travel?, and most of them have volunteered for me whether they ask folks to pay them or do it for free. So, there is a lot of different information we need for the Education & Outreach Registry

MD: OK. So, why don't you remind me and we will work on that, Jeff. So, everyone register and make sure you can edit it and the search works. Your assignment is to do that by the end of the week. OK Kendrick, do you want to talk about CASP?

KW: Sure. A little background information: CASP is the North Carolina Calling Amphibian Survey Program is a citizen science type research program associated with the North American Amphibian Monitoring Programs administered by the USGS. They have an online database so volunteers can get really involved and directly enter their data and view data nationwide. This was our first year. There were 61 random routes selected by the national coordinator throughout North Carolina. We have the ability to add non-random routes for areas we would like to concentrate on. However, we are trying to fill all of the random routes before we pursue that to any extent. This was our first year of sampling and 33 routes were assigned, 32 random routes. Out of 33, four were not run due to volunteer limitations, one for not receiving a packet, and four are of unknown status. That leaves 24-28 that were run at least once, which is not too bad for the first year.

MD: That is really good for just a pilot year.

SC: Out of the four not run, they were not run in any window?

KW: No. One in the mountains, one in the coastal plain, and two in the piedmont. 21 routes have data entered online by the volunteers. There were a total of 40 volunteers with some doubling up on routes to take up slack or share the load. We are working on advertising for next year (Passed out some example brochures). The E&O working group will be putting on a workshop October 18?

JH: Yeah, it will be at Goose Creek State Park and we decided on 4pm-9pm. I don't know if anything will be calling then but maybe a hurricane will come. Steve, could I use your PowerPoint that you used at the annual meeting for the workshop?

SP: Yeah, that's fine.

JH: I was going to come up with something, but if you have already done it...

SP: Yeah, Yeah, that is perfectly fine. I will put it on an ftp site. Just send me an email.

KW: And, I think that is about it. Oh, as an incentive we will be providing each route assigned volunteer a free copy of the new CD and booklet, "Frogs and Toads of NC".

SC: And, I guess a couple of deadlines are coming up...

KW: Oh yeah, the volunteers need to submit their hard copy data to us by Friday, September 1, 2006. Our deadline is a month earlier than national.

SC: And, I have been asked if there will be a data summary available. It shouldn't be too hard to develop that. We could certainly put something together. I wasn't planning on it for the first year. If you are running a route, would you like to see some stats like that?

JH, EC, JB, RG, SP, MD: Yes.

AB: Is there some feedback to the commission?

SC: Yes, there would be a project report associated with this program prepared for the Commission, but it would be a little bit different than what we give the volunteers.

JB: Your text is cut off on the brochure

KW: Yeah, these are actually copies of the drafts.

SC: There are good ones being printed at Kinko's right now.

SP: Has anybody thought about collecting habitat information? We talked about that last meeting and I think I was supposed to provide a datasheet... don't you hate it when you bring something up that you were supposed to do?

KW: I was thinking about that reading the minutes from the last meeting. And there was some question about how often to collect that data.

RG: What kind of data do you want to collect?

SP: Something you could do in three or five minutes and note whether it is a pond or an ephemeral pool or cow pasture.

MD: Kind of like what you did with your Masters, take the state data and do an analysis.

SC: Would you collect the data before you ran the route or....?

SP: It would probably be best in May or something like that

AB: It is one thing to train people to learn frog calls but training people on habitat is another...

EC: Maybe do a group effort, go out and classify these things.

MD: Or just do a coarse evaluation... is it forest, how far away is the nearest house? I just think that the specific habitat stuff may be too difficult. You could also do a lot just from aerial photography.

RG: I have a lot of photographs from groundtruthing most of the sites that I took at every stop. Why not have volunteers re-photograph the site?

SP: I think any information we get will be good.

JH: One thing I would want to know, when you get out at your point do you record things only calling from the wetland or pond?

KW: That is a good question. But now we get into distance sampling which is a more complicated technique. I am not so sure that would work...

AB: Maybe we should have a set distance because you can hear a chorus a mile away but not well enough to tell what number to use. Maybe we should limit it to a quarter mile.

JH: Yeah I agree, that's what should be standardized.

JB: I think it said whatever you can hear.

JH: Yeah, it did. But...

Group: But then that complicates any habitat data we collect.

JH: That's my point.

EC: I still think that collecting habitat data is important.

BB: Maybe you could have a check off of all habitats that apply.

SC: Or even ask for comments about any habitat changes from year to year.

SP: When I did this, I did a rapid assessment of the habitat and land use within 100 meters of the sampling location. And, I only recorded what I heard within that distance.

JH: I think that has merit but it depends on what kind of data you want to pull.

AB: And, different species can't be heard from the same distance.

SC: Well, I think this does not matter because the protocol is already set.

MD: Yeah, and every study is going to have limitations. We already have questions about how well some folks can distinguish frog calls and we are going to have to do some filtering. So maybe we do the best we can. So like, within 100 meters you do a rapid habitat assessment and maybe you hear green treefrogs 150 meters away. I think it would be somewhat valuable.

SC: And maybe the habitat check-off would be the best way.

MD: parking lot, pine forest, etc.

SC: Is that it for CASP?

KW: Unless anyone has more questions.

EC: I noticed that it goes a lot better when you have someone with you and volunteers should take someone along.

RG: I suggest that more than one person go anyway for safety reasons.

JH: There is some issue with road safety too.

RG: Yeah, we skipped lots of great sites groundtruthing because of no safe parking.

KW: That is a good idea, to use the buddy system, for a lot of reasons. But one thing to keep in mind is the protocol and only one person should be counting frogs, not collaborating with the other person. The quizzes taken are used in analysis and the national coordinator wanted me to make sure everyone is aware of this.

MD: Anything else? Yeah, a brief report on the results, some highlights to all the volunteers would be a great thing.

BB?: You could put it on the website.

SC and group: There you go....great idea.

MD: Steve is going to update everyone on the Herp Atlas.

SP: For those who don't know what the Herp Atlas is, it is a tool that maps the distribution of herps in NC and relies heavily on the general public for data. There is a mapping tool and they are able to download pictures. There is a My Herps section that allows the user to map their observations. I would like to thank everyone for looking at it back in April and making suggestions. We have made a lot of changes since then and we are not done making changes. We have better instructions. You can register with a user name instead of an email address. You can update your settings now. We had some problems with the base map. You can search by common name now and if you remember there is a page with the most commonly observed species. I think it tells you the top three. There are endless possibilities with what we can do with that. Some folks suggested they would rather use lat-long instead of UTM's. We now have a link to a conversion tool.

MD: Of course, if you just use the mapping tool then you don't have to worry about it. Just zoom in and click.

SP: You can upload multiple pics of your individual. Also for multiple sightings in one location, instead of re-entering it you can just 'submit another observation'. We are trying to make things easier as we move along. We are in the process of making big changes and after that we should be able to put it out there. We are in the process of creating a separate database to allow volunteers with the WRC to enter hours and

mileage. We are also letting the administrator be able to edit or remove observations that are questionable and store them in a separate database.

SC: Will the editor know that stuff is flagged?

SP: If I saw something funny and I couldn't get in touch with them, then I would remove their record.

SC: Will they still be able to access their observations?

SP: The My Herps section shouldn't be affected by it.

RG: What if someone has a question about observations...

SP: Yeah, we rely heavily on people to give honest observations. I would probably contact that person. If we have a picture and we think it is good, then we would probably accept it.

MD: Well, it's just like if I submitted a king snake to the museum with no data.

JB: Yeah, we really wish you would stop doing that.

SP: Since it is citizen science, we are really relying on the public

MD: One thing folks should realize is that the data in there is not real data. There is some bogus stuff right now.

SP: But, you can go in and look around.

JH: Do you have to upload a picture?

SP: No.

AB: Do you have any instructions on how to take a photo?

MD: No.

SP: We can do like the instructions for taking locality data and add that.

MD: Another thing we need to think about is how we are going to publicize this. Maybe get something in the Wildlife in NC. Obviously email all the NCPARC folks and maybe put it on the PARC list serve.

AB: There is an education channel that might make it assessable to teachers who want to do a class on it...

JH: I can also see that this is something we could do a mini-session on at the NC Science Teachers Association.

MD: A lot of schools have outdoor classrooms

AB: The museum has a number of educators that provide teacher workshops and you could give a presentation to a few key people at the museum and there is an extensive list of teachers that have participated and are active.

JG: Every community that has cable TV has a public announcement channel

MD: I think another thing to do is get some brochures made up. That would be a relatively easy thing to do.

SC: So when do you think your launch date will be?

MD: Well, Tuti who programs it will be coming here in a couple of weeks and we will go over the last things he needs to get done. We're hoping a month to 6 weeks. We will send an email to NCPARC members and do kind of like 'Grand Openings' when they do more than one.

SC: Wildlife in NC would be good place but not a whole article, which are done a year in advance but in the back of the magazine they have space. We want to get this to them as soon as possible.

MD: And, we could make the brochures at Davidson.

SC: As long as the materials are for recruiting volunteers and not educational purposes, which this is, that is OK.

MD: Can you do a press release?

SC: Yes. Again, it needs to be timely so we can get it out on the wire.

MD: OK. Anything else? OK, Lori was supposed to be here but something happened?

SC: Yes, they had a big storm and lightning ran in on her wires and fried everything that was electronic so she had to stay there to wait for the electrician.

MD: OK Alvin, how is the bibliography coming?

AB: OK, we received the software package EndNote and have been playing around with it. It is amazingly simple to operate.

SC: Yeah, Lori told me she had never used it before and found it easy to learn. She said that Mike has provided her with thousands of records. She has been entering all the bog turtle references and will soon solicit others for references.

JH: (To MD) Did you send her all the bibliotherp stuff?

MD: Yes. It's probably two or three years old, I haven't updated it.

AB: Lori and I have been bringing in already compiled databases that the museum and the commission have used for various things.

MD: Well, this will never be done but eventually I would like to put it on the website so the people can download and use it. We will update it and have the date of the update.

JH: If I have an EndNote file should I send it to you, Lori, or wait?

AB: Hang on just a minute and we will solicit you for it when we are done testing it and Lori gets back online.

MD: Let's take a 5 minute break...

BREAK

MD: Zach, do you have something?

ZO: I created these brochures for hunting season and I wanted to bring y'all some. I've given a few out to Chris Helms at Lake Waccamaw because he said he could distribute some during dove season. Basically, I thought this would get us some more information from the people who are out there where they might encounter an Eastern Diamondback. It's kind of like being a dragon slayer looking for Diamondbacks in North Carolina.

SC: Thanks Zach for doing this. How many have you printed up?

ZO: One hundred. We can have a little email discussion on the dos and don'ts with it and make it more informative. We don't want them bringing them to us in buckets.

MD: Do you want to make this an NCPARC thing?

ZO: We can, that was another thing I wanted to ask. I did not want to put people's logos on there without finding out if that is what they wanted. I kept others phone numbers off and just put mine on there.

AB: Do you have this brochure on a computer file?

ZO: Yes.

AB: Can you email me that? Is the distribution map down there a habitat map?

ZO: Yes. It uses museum sitings and personal window surveys of habitat. The greener areas are drier and the lighter areas are wet.

MD: What kind of file is it?

ZO: I can make it a JPG but it is currently a TIFF. Can everybody take a JPG?

AB: If your text is in a Word document then you could just send that

SC: What about when everyone has commented on it and gotten it like we want it, we publish it on the website?

ZO: Yeah. Because I know hunters go online to look up what they saw in the field. That would be great. Jeff was talking about putting the other two rattlesnakes for reporting.

MD: Thanks Zach. Anyone else? My next thing is a question for Sarah and everyone might want to discuss it. Are there plans for another NCPARC meeting? If so, when and what would it entail.

SC: That issue was handled by the E&O Working Group and they have formed a small Annual Meeting Committee. I think it came down to most people agreeing that the Summit would be the place to have it again. Jeff?

JH: We were going to look at a couple of different sites, but Brown Summit seemed to be the site most people were interested in. At first, I was the only committee planner and when Ed said he would like to be involved if it was held at a State Park, he became the second committee member.

SC: Well, I'll be helping too. But, it seems like most people that attended the last one wanted future meetings to be held in the central part of the state. I don't know of a schedule...

JH: Yes, we discussed that minimally. I am hoping to spend more time on that at the next E&O meeting. But, we were thinking of keeping the same format. We can brainstorm. Ed was interested in techniques. A session on regional herpetology and something else...

EC: Habitat Management Guidelines...

JH: Oh yeah. We don't have anything finalized and in my opinion there needs to be representatives from each Working Group on the Annual Meeting Planning Committee.

SC: The committee needs to book a place ASAP just to get the place reserved.

MD: Last year we had it during the week and I thought it was great to attract agency personnel. Those are who we are really trying to attract. They will get more out of this than lay people.

SC: Grover and Sandy emailed me to clarify the differences between NCHS and NCPARC. So, bringing in agency personnel who don't normally deal with herps but whose work may affect herps is a big part of NCPARC.

AB: The NCHS meetings are always on weekends. The Reptile and Amphibian Day at the museum is around the time of NCPARC meeting.

SC: Bob Flook suggested we might do a joint thing for Herp Day, but I don't think that would be something to do just yet.

MD: If a meeting was held on a weekend it would need to be geared more toward an education and outreach type.

AB: Herp Day draws 12 to 18 thousand people. It is mainly a family affair. If you held it a week in advance that might be better.

JH: To me, what makes sense for that venue is an NCPARC booth with information.

SC: Jeff, let's get together and pick a date and I can make the reservations. Based on the surveys, attendees liked the one-night model. Also, we noticed that at The Summit there is a lot of private land and they said they could put us in touch with someone who might want a vernal pool. We could do a demonstration on creating those or something similar.

JH: It might be nice to go to a site and show what HMGs to do and what not to do.

SC: We can iron out the content later but we need to get a date.

JH: Ed, did you call the Summit yet?

EC: No. We didn't know when or where yet so...

MD: So, we're leaving this until you find out about availability?

SC: Yes. The timing of last year's seemed like a great time. It did not interfere with the field season and was not too cold.

EC: That time would be a great lead in to Herp Day.

SC: Or is that too much herps at one time?

Group: Too much

JH: Too much planning because I am heavily involved in Herp Day.

SC: March 17 is Herp Day so don't make it too close to that. Either the week before or the week after.

MD: Anything else?

AB: Did you want to talk about the HMGs? This is great for land managers but not lay people.

MD: I agree.

AB: I would think that those agency folks, foresters, land managers, etc. should be who we inform of its availability.

SC: They wanted to know how many gratis copies we could use. Give me a number and I will send it to them. So, if you know of anyone who could use this guide, people who manage land for whatever purpose, let me know. The way it is set up is to show the worst to best scenario for herps.

AB: Groups that really need this are the land trusts across the state.

SC: Yes, I have already targeted them. I have been in contact with the statewide organization.

JH: I have also been thinking of the DOD.

BB: Yeah, we don't even have money for toilet paper much less books.

SC: OK, how many do you need?

BB: 26 rolls will be plenty....

(Laughter)

MD: OK. Anything else? I have been wondering what is the best way to get information to people who are making development decisions on a day-to-day basis. We are not talking about laws but, if you want to include herps in planning then here are some things you can do. I think the effects of this relative to collecting is that development has much more of an effect on herp populations.

AB: The developer is not the place to go because they are ephemeral. The town ordinances or state regulations and getting permits are where this is going to have an effect. Getting the permitting process to deliver information may be a good way to go. And, city planners that deal with quality of life and put it in regulations will have the greatest effect

MD: How do we reach those county and city planners?

BB: You need to make it inclusive with birds and other cuddly animals.

MD: Well, I would argue now that herps are being viewed as more interesting...

AB: Promote watchable wildlife...quality of life...

MD: Right. That is where we have developers talking directly to us. But they don't want to hear, "don't build the houses right up to the wetland."

AB: If they can talk a good story, they get the job. If we can get the right thing accomplished for the wrong reasons, you still get the right thing accomplished. I can give you some names of these green building associations like the Wildlife Commission.

SC: This may be something we can teach at a workshop on how to get involved with your town planners, etc.

MD: Personally, I would rather be working on a paper or analyzing data than doing this sort of thing and I realize that it is extremely important. Some people do like doing this stuff. It is gratifying when working together with town planners; we can get a wetland saved by our research results.

SC: So what was the process? Did they contact you?

SP: We had to contact these people for our research and we then became involved.

MD: It can be frustrating after becoming involved and things happening completely different.

AB: The Commission is hiring an Urban Biologist who will be doing a lot of this work. I understand you have interviewed and are about to hire somebody.

SC: Yes, they have had the interviews but I don't know if they have made a decision. This position targets areas for conservation in urban and suburban areas. Going to town meetings and meeting with green builders.

AB: This is another bit of information that they can use.

MD: I think we need some basic studies that can show when you develop a certain area of land, you kill this many of this species. That's the kind of thing that will have an impact. But, we don't have that kind of data. I was thinking if we could take a piece of property and study the animals, put transmitters on box turtles, and show what happens after development...

JB: Jack Ludlow used to do that. He would keep a Gopher Tortoise in his freezer and then go to the town meeting and say, "here is what you *\$#@s are killing out there." He was very popular!

MD: Anyway, I am looking for ideas for targeting permittees and planners.

RG: Brief, simple publications that are geared to as local as you can get.

SC: You might be asking the wrong group. We need to be networking with these green builders associations so they can tell us how to go about approaching these issues.

AS: Isn't this something for the E&O working group?

JH: One thing that we in E&O were talking about is condensing the HMGs for specific audiences. For me, having the information is not a problem, it is how to get it there effectively and I don't know how to do that.

SC: Some people who do that sort of thing for a living should be able to help.

AB: Most developers concentrate on the bottom line.

BB: There are places in the mountains where these large lot developments are saving a lot of land.

AB: That is going to vary across the state.

JP: A lot of researchers have the attitude that a neighborhood is already trashed and not worth researching. I am not sure if it's obvious what the answer to that is.

MD: These developments are going in. If you accept that as the default, then what can you do to make it better. Should you have big lots that retain some of the habitat or people crammed in and leave a section alone? Some would argue either way depending...

AB: Well, spreading people over a wider landmass, unless you get up to 3 or 5 acres with natural habitat then it is no good. I think cramming people into a smaller area and leaving a common area that is natural habitat is more valuable.

KW: Maybe there could be some sort of incentive program with homeowner's association, there are new developments that have natural areas used for mitigation or whatever that are just there. If you could give incentives for ¾ of people's lots to be left as native forest then that could have a positive impact.

MD: I know that Audubon has certification for golf courses. I used to think golf courses were awful but in a sea of urbanization they can be refuges.

AB: Also, there are covenants or homeowners rules that a lot of wildlife lovers get cited for not manicuring your lawn. How do you get those ordinances off the books?

SC: Property value is what people are worried about.

MD: Basically what we are talking is a change in western culture. Be thinking about concrete, efficient ways of accomplishing these goals.

SC: I will make a point for the new Urban Biologist to attend our next meeting.

ZO: Not to bring up more work, but if we can attend fall festivals in small communities we might be able to increase the exposure of our projects.

MD: Other issues before we sign off?

SC: I just wanted to tell y'all that I came back from a PARC meeting in Arizona a few weeks ago and it was enlightening to see how far ahead we are relative to the rest of the chapters. We are even ahead of whole regions. There are four states with chapters that don't have much of anything going. So, congratulations on a lot of hard work.

AB: A key thing on this was to get agencies involved and that has really helped.

SC: I think so too, and the volunteer hours were immense last year.

AB: Well, I hope other states take note.

JG: I just wanted to mention that a recent PVA of hellbenders has been done and the populations are not doing as well as we thought. We tried to estimate population sizes with some crude data. 139,000 in the east. Plan to work on hellbenders.

SC: I also wanted to mention the three new herp positions the Commission is planning, and they should be posted soon.

MD: Thanks for coming everyone.

Adjournment: 3:30