

# Bringing it Home: Participating in Local Conservation

A workshop by the  
AAZK Conservation Committee

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# Abstract

- An important aspect of conservation is to “Think Globally, Act Locally”. A zookeeper’s role in conservation is to raise awareness, raise funds and participate in projects when possible. It can be time-consuming and expensive to work directly with conservation of the species that we take care of in the wild, but there are many ways we can learn the skills involved in fieldwork by participating in conservation efforts at home. We can act locally through land and natural resources preservation, flora conservation and fauna conservation.
- This workshop will demonstrate the reasons that zookeepers, AAZK chapters, and zoos should get involved in local conservation efforts. Participants will learn how to find the many opportunities to be involved in conservation projects, how they can contribute their time and talents to conservation, and how to develop skills for participating in fieldwork. Participants will also be provided with examples of successful partnerships, resources for finding projects in their area and the steps required to begin to become involved in local conservation efforts.

# Think globally, act Locally

**“In the end we will conserve only what we love. We will love only what we understand. We will understand only what we**

- **Lots of zoos focus on exotic mega fauna**
  - Easy to excite guests
  - Big animals
  - Furry and cute
  - Devastating stats
- **Get visitors excited about local flora and fauna!**
  - We have cute animals HERE
  - That have devastating stats
  - They are closer to home, more relatable to guests
  - Gives keepers more realistic field opportunities!

# Why get involved?

- Good experience
- Make a difference
- Learn more about a species or habitat
- Easier to get out in the field
- Help to convey the conservation message to Zoo guests

# How to get involved

- Contact your state agency
- DNR (Department of Natural Resources)
- Fish and Wildlife Service
- PARC (Partners in Amphibian and Reptile Conservation)
- Citizen Science
- Frog Watch USA
- North American Amphibian Monitoring Program
- Contact Local Universities
- Research assistant positions
- Contact your local National Parks
- Exotic plant removal
- Species counts

# Examples of local conservation initiatives on an institutional level

- Houston Zoo
- Toad trackers
- Saint Louis Zoo
- Native Pollinators
- Ozark Hellbenders
- American Burying Beetle
- Monterrey Bay Aquarium
- Monterrey Bay Seafood Watch Initiative
- Smithsonian National Zoological Park
- Appalachian Salamander lab
- Chytrid swabbing
- Phoenix Zoo
- Black footed ferrets, Chiracaua leopard frogs, snails, garter snakes, squirrels at the Phoenix Zoo
- Buffalo Zoo
- Eastern hellbender
- Buffalo river clean up
- Chytrid swabbing
- Bronx Zoo
- Easter Hellbender
- Snapping turtle research in the Bronx river
- Utica Zoo
- Chittenango Snail Project and a project with the NYS Department of Environmental Conservation and local universities doing species assessment at our local marsh with the end goal of reintroduction of spotted turtles to the region- Utica Zoo

# Toad Trackers



- An interactive program which aims to teach students field research methods used by conservation biologists to study animal populations
- Grant from the Texas Parks and Wildlife Outdoor Outreach Program
- Coastal Plains toad (*Bufo nebulifer*) on Zoo grounds for processing and data collection
- In addition to encouraging a new generation of wildlife biologists, this program is also a forum in which students are educated about amphibian ecology, global amphibian extinctions and why monitoring local amphibian populations are important to detecting declines in our own region.
- Additionally, the data collected through this project will be used to publish a peer-reviewed paper on native toad populations based on the work of citizen scientists

# 2010 Toad Trackers Field

## Overview:

- They captured a total of 39 *Bufo nebulifer*.
- 77% of captured toads were female, 21% were male and 2% could not be determined due to life stage. Sex ratio of 4:15.
- they also detected Rio Grande chirping frogs and Green tree frogs at the Zoo on most field evenings.



# Toad Trackers participants

- 16 home school participants
- 9 Zoo crew participants
- 35 Hispanic Women's Network of Texas
- 18 Camp Zoofari
- 10 Camp Zoofari



# Examples of local conservation at the individual level

- Lori Smith-Animal Keeper, Bird House Smithsonian's National Zoological Park
- Volunteers with the New Jersey Fish and Game, Endangered and Non-species Game program working on their shorebird banding project.

# New Jersey Fish and Game, Endangered and Non-species Game program

- Red knot (*Calidris canutus*), a small shorebird, about the size of a robin and its stop off on the Delaware Bay during its migration from South America to their breeding grounds in the Artic.
- This stop-off is timed precisely with the horseshoe crab spawning season, which occurs around the full moon during the month of May. The red knots stop on the Delaware Bay during this time to refuel on the nutrient rich crab eggs in order to continue on their migration to the Artic



# Volunteered

- I had answered an ad in Wildlife Conservation magazine for a volunteer on a project that had a lot of local conservation involvement
- I take part in netting, banding and collecting data on the birds that can be used to monitor the population's health
- When I first started volunteering, there were large numbers of red knots on the Delaware Bay and just in the 13 years I have been involved with this project, I have seen the numbers dramatically decrease
- This has been a very rewarding project as it deals with issues in my own backyard and I have been able to really see conservation in action, meet researchers from around the world and learn some valuable skills

# Speaker: Norm Gershenz

**Norman Gershenz is the co-founder and CEO of SaveNature.Org and co-founder of the Insect Discovery Lab. SaveNature.Org has raised more than \$4.1 million to help preserve thousands of acres of rainforest and coral reef habitat around the world. Norm created and developed the first Adopt An Acre program in the United States as well as the award winning Conservation Parking Meter; both raise funds for international conservation. SaveNature.Org's work has been highlighted in National Geographic, Time Magazine, and ABC's World News Tonight.**

**Norm was affiliated with the San Francisco Zoo for more than 18 years as an educator, member of the animal care staff, fundraiser, and researcher. Norm has tracked black rhinos in Zimbabwe, chased orangutans in Borneo, and stalked the elusive platypus in Australia. He has handled boas and bobcats, pandas and elephants, snow leopards and koalas, hippos and hornbills. He has worked as a field biologist and naturalist in Borneo, Malaysia, India, Nepal, Peru, Costa Rica, Guatemala, Belize, Ecuador, Panama and Namibia.**

**In 2010 Norm was awarded the prestigious Elizabeth Terwilliger Prize for conservation.**

**Norm is also noted gourmet insect chef, a lecturer in biology, an expert birder AND can spot a beetle at 50 mph.**