CONSERVATION ENDOWMENT FUND
A Citizen Science Training Model for Investigating the Presence or Absence of Amphibian Chytrid Fungus in Amphibian Populations

CEF CONSERVATION ENDOWMENT FUND

In 2009, the Buffalo Zoo, and partners the Roger Tory Peterson Institute and the University at Buffalo, received a grant from the AZA’s Conservation Endowment Fund (CEF) to develop and test a citizen science training model for investigating chytrid fungus in western New York.

The New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (NYSDEC) selected four field sites for testing. After developing and implementing a three-day training model, in Spring of 2010, we sent four groups out to test assigned field sites and were able to positively demonstrate the effectiveness of the training model.

Spring of 2011 took us into the field again for a second field test of the model with several small changes intended to make the process more efficient. New recruits were Buffalo Zoo docents, staff, and Western New York Herpetological Society members. Rather than splitting the volunteers into small groups assigned to specific sites, citizen scientists acted as one team with one team leader, making it easier to plan field trips and reducing the impact of missing unavailable citizen scientists. Classroom-style training was shortened to two days.

Training model evaluation results showed that it significantly increased citizen scientists’ ability to identify local amphibians and their calls; successfully taught them about Bd and proper sampling techniques; and increased their familiarity with proper field hygiene.

The hope is that this training model will soon be available for dissemination to other interested organizations as a way to expand their human resources for more efficient Bd testing.

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