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Photo: Bob Ferguson
Recent mornings have been touched by frost, signaling the winding down of the 2015 herping season. Reflecting on the records which have come in this year, I am again greatly impressed with the results of our volunteer efforts. Many new county records have been documented, and many rare species have been reconfirmed at historical sites as well as at new locations. Additionally, many volunteers have been adjusting their search strategies by focusing on quads and blocks lacking records needed to attain the PARS goal of 10 species per block and 25 species per quad. As this project moves forward, you will see more and more emphasis on this approach in our newsletters and social media posts. As a reminder, registered volunteers can track our quad/block progress on the PARS website. After logging in, click on the ‘Search by quad/block’ option under the ‘Search’ tab.

We also encourage volunteers to keep in touch and network with their county and regional coordinators. These folks can help steer volunteers to locations in quads and blocks lacking records and can suggest new potential blocks for rare species, based on existing records. The contact information for our coordinators can be found on the last page of each newsletter. Speaking of coordinators, we have been delighted by the spike in county coordinator enlistment during this past year. We now have twenty-one county coordinators in addition to our six regional coordinators. The backgrounds for these folks vary widely. Some have strong academic backgrounds with impressive credentials, and several serve on faculties at universities. Some are, or have been, involved with important herpetological research. Others have no academic or professional herpetological background but are highly motivated amateur field herpetologists. The things all of these folks do have in common are a passion for reptiles and amphibians, a belief in the mission of PARS, an enthusiasm to help coordinate the volunteers in their territories, and a readiness to help promote the project for additional support in various ways.

Ideally, we would like to have a coordinator for each county in Pennsylvania. There are sixty-seven counties in our state, some of which are sparsely populated. Some of our current coordinators are actually spreading their efforts over neighboring counties in addition to their own, and this will go a long way in helping to get adequate coverage of these leader-less districts. However, we feel sixty-seven county coordinators is a goal worth pursuing. If you live in, or near, a county which currently is without a coordinator, please consider the possibility of volunteering for one of these positions. The associated tasks are varied, and we ask only that coordinators choose those which suit their comfort levels. On average, coordinator-related activity should take no more than a few of hours per week. If you would like to learn more about what is involved with being a county coordinator, please contact me: mcorn@machac.org.

Marlin Corn
PARS Statewide Coordinator
WEBSITE OVERHAUL COMPLETED

You may have recently noticed a new look to the PARS website. It was recently overhauled now has a cleaner, faster interface and a number of other improvements, such as block image view on the home page, a like system to like records on PARS, notifications for likes and comments on records, and Facebook share button to share and like records.

NEW COORDINATOR RECRUITS

Please welcome Chris Bortz as our new coordinator for Schuylkill County, and Kyle Fawcett for Snyder County. Also, Bob Ferguson has returned to the PARS coordinator ranks as our Carbon County coordinator. While we have a quickly growing team of County Coordinators, many counties are still without a leader. If you would like to be a County Coordinator please contact Marlin Corn: Marlin Corn: mcorn@machac.org.

VENUE FOR NEXT YEARS ANNUAL MEETING SOUGHT

The PARS Annual Meeting will be held in late March again next year, and we are seeking a venue which is centrally located in Pennsylvania. The PFBC headquarters in Harrisburg was a prefect facility for last year’s meeting in all respects except that it was an challenging distance for the volunteers who came from the northwestern regions of the state. If anyone knows of an organization which would be willing to allow us to use a facility in central PA, please contact Marlin Corn: mcorn@machac.org.
Announcing

The First Annual

PARS PHOTOGRAPHY CONTEST

Since the launch of PARS we have received thousands upon thousands of voucher photos, many of which are outstanding examples of wildlife photography. Among these, certain photos stand out, whether it be for exceptional clarity, composition, behavior of the subject, or other reasons. We would like to start showcasing the quality of our best photographers with an annual photography contest. Entrants in the categories listed below will compete for 1st, 2nd and 3rd place awards, and winning photographs will appear in the last newsletter issue of each year until 2022. First place winners may see their winning photographs in or on the cover of a future PARS newsletter, or possibly in the final publication for the PARS project. One photograph will be chosen as the ‘Best of Show’ grand prizewinner each year. Photographs will be judged on composition, creativity and clarity of the shot. Prizes are limited to certificates and ribbons, but you will achieve the esteem of the herping community.

Contest Categories:

1. **Species Representation** ~ These photos should be approached as though they were going to be used as a field guide representation of the subject. Adult, juvenile, larval and egg stages are all acceptable, but only two photos of each species may be submitted.

2. **Behavior** - Action photos showing a specimen (or specimens) engaged in a natural activity such as feeding, courtship, etc.

3. **Herps in the Landscape** - Photographs illustrating an amphibian or reptile in a classic natural landscape setting.

4. **Macro Photography** - Close-up photos of any portion of an amphibian’s or reptile’s body.

5. **Free Form / Experimental** - Have the urge to submit a photo in which you changed the color of a Green Frog to electric orange? This fun category is for you.

Deadline for photo submission in this year’s contest is June 30, 2016. Winners will be announced in the Winter 2016/2017 newsletter, which will also showcase the winning photos.
The First Annual
PARS PHOTOGRAPHY CONTEST

RULES:

Who Is Eligible?
Registered PARS participants only, including all volunteers, coordinators, land-owners, MACHAC and PFBC personnel. Participants will retain ownership of their photographs, but by submitting agree to allow MACHAC to use the photographs in any of its future publications.

Field Parameters:
• Animals should not be unduly stressed or abused to obtain photographs.
• Photographs must be shot on location where the animal was found, preferably within Pennsylvania’s borders.

How Many Photos Can Be Submitted?
Each year, two photographs for each Pennsylvania species may be submitted in the Species Representation category, and one photograph may be submitted for each of the other categories.

How To Submit:
• Send photos as attachments via email to photos@paherpsurvey.org.
• Only one species should be included in each email.
• In the subject line write: ‘PARS photo contest’ and the species name.
• In the email text please state the species and category of entry for each photo.
• Photos should be labeled with the last name of the photographer, a hyphen, the species name, photo format, and a number if two photos are being submitted for the same species. Example of two spring peeper photos submitted: poston-crucifer1.jpg, poston-crucifer2.jpg.

Technical Photo Criteria
• Format for final photos: high-resolution JPG or TIF.
• Preferred photo size 1500 x 2100 pixels or more.
• Minimum photo size 1200 x 1200 pixels.
• Photos should be smoothly pixilated even at 100% zoom.
The First Annual
PARS PHOTOGRAPHY CONTEST

Judging Criteria:
Photos will first be screened by MACHAC personnel to ensure criteria have been met, and then presented anonymously to a panel of three judges without photographer information. These judges will select the winning photo for each contest category. Judges may enter the contest but will not be permitted to judge their own photos. Photo judging will be based on:

• Originality
• Technical execution
• How well the individual represents the Pennsylvania phenotype or morphology of the species in the ‘Species Representation’ category.

PLEASE:

• No dead animals (e.g., roadkill).
• No multiple species.
• No text, symbols, or watermarks permitted on photos.
• Hand-held or captive is acceptable if the hand (or net or container) doesn’t show in the photo.
• Animal should comprise > 50% of the photo.

Legalities:

• Photographs are donations, not purchased.
• No prizes for this contest are awarded other than certificates and/or ribbons.
• You will receive credit for each photo published.
• You will retain legal rights for future use of your photographs.
• You will be required to sign a release form that grants MACHAC and the PFBC the rights to use your photograph in any of their future publications, including electronic. Participants under the age of 18 must have a parent or legal guardian co-sign for them.
• Final size and cropping will be determined by MACHAC.

Judges Wanted:
We will need three volunteers to assist in judging the entries. Volunteer judges should have professional photography experience, preferably in wildlife photography, or other appropriate credentials. Judges may enter their own photographs, but will not be allowed to vote for their own photos. If you are interested in volunteering as a judge for the contest, please contact Marlin Corn: mcorn@machac.org.
MARK YOUR CALENDAR!

Special PARS Northeast Regional Meeting: Monroe County:

Larry Laubach, PARS Northeast Regional Coordinator, is hosting a social meeting for the PARS members and County Coordinators in the northeast region of the state (Bradford, Susquehanna, Wayne, Sullivan, Wyoming, Lackawanna, Pike, Monroe, Carbon, Luzerne and Columbia Counties). There will be a lecture by PARS co-founder Dr. Thomas LaDuke; ‘The Importance of Ecological Monitoring for the Conservation of Amphibians and Reptiles in Pennsylvania’. There will also possibly be an optional tour of the Schisler Wildlife Museum.

December 19, 2015, 10:30 a.m. - 3:00 p.m.
(doors opened and coffee served at 9:30 a.m.)
Kurtz Lecture Room 122
Moore Biology Hall, East Stroudsburg University
200 Prospect St., East Stroudsburg, PA 18301
Please RSVP to Larry by December 1st: ne@paherpsurvey.org

More to be scheduled – stay tuned for details!
Find current events at
http://paherpsurvey.org/news/events
or on Facebook at
http://facebook.com/paherpsurvey

PARS Informative Presentations & Volunteer Workshops:

Feb. 24 2016, 10:30 A.M. - Bucks County
PARS Introductory Presentation/Local Herps
Tohickon Garden Club Meeting
Ottsville Firehouse Social Hall
249 Durham Rd., Ottsville, PA 18942
For details, contact: mcorn@machac.org

April 23 2016, 10 A.M. - Bucks County
Herp Talk & Walk
Silver Lake Nature Center
1306 Bath Rd., Bristol, PA 19007
Registration required: 215-785-1177

PARS volunteers Chris and Cassie Bortz in action during the recent Bedford County Herp Blitz.
Highlights of the 2015 Summer Season

Frogs
An Eastern Spadefoot was found in Union County, one of only a handful of records for this species in that county since 1941. Also, the first PARS observation of an Eastern Spadefoot in Cumberland County was made. A total of seven Eastern Spadefoot records were made this summer. The first observation of a Northern Leopard Frog in Mercer County since 1932 was recorded, one of thirteen verified records received for the summer season.

Salamanders
Two records for Marbled Salamanders were received from Bucks County, one of which represents a significant range extension in this county. A skeleton of an Eastern Hellbender found in Elk County represents an apparent county record for this species, although an observation of a live specimen was subsequently submitted. Three Eastern Hellbender records were submitted from Venango County, the first since 1947. A Crawford County Hellbender observation represents the first record in this county since 1991, and a Somerset County specimen was the first since 1985. Sixteen records for Eastern Hellbenders were received in all. A common Mudpuppy record in Forest County was the first since 1991.

Turtles
An incredible 60 Wood Turtle and 71 Eastern Box Turtle records were received, but sadly a large number of these were DOR.

Lizards
Eleven records came in for Northern Coal Skinks, two of which are the first verifiable records from Forest County since 1959, and the first voucher for Warren County since 1988; an adult female guarding her eggs.

Snakes
Of seven records received for Eastern Hog-nosed Snakes, three were the first Centre County records since the launch of PARS. Two records submitted for Smooth Greensnakes represent the first observations of this species in Beaver County since 1902, and an observation from Susquehanna County was the first PARS record. Three Mountain Earthsnakes were found under a log in Clarion County, apparently a county record. Eleven records for Ribbonsnakes were received, and two observations were submitted for one of Pennsylvania’s rarest serpents, the Eastern Massasauga.
Observations from the Field

Summary of vouchered records received for July 2015 through September 2015:
Please note that these numbers represent the number of blocks, not actual numbers of specimens.
Records not submitted by the end of the month may not be included.
Some records listed here have not yet passed through the verification process.

Salamanders
Eastern Hellbender: 16
Common Mudpuppy: 6
Blue-spotted Salamander: 1
Spotted Salamander: 21
Marbled Salamander: 2
Northern Dusky Salamander: 145
Seal Salamander: 22
Allegheny Mountain Dusky Salamander: 306
Northern Two-lined Salamander: 174
Long-tailed Salamander: 73
Northern Spring Salamander: 98
Four-toed Salamander: 3
Red-spotted Newt: 157
Eastern Red-backed Salamander: 151
Slimy Salamander: 135
Valley & Ridge Salamander: 3
Wehrle's Salamander: 31
Northern Red Salamander: 48

Frogs
Eastern Cricket Frog: 1
Eastern American Toad: 268
Fowler's Toad: 15
Cope's Gray Treefrog: 1
Gray Treefrog: 35
Undetermined Gray Treefrog spp: 8
American Bullfrog: 83
Green Frog: 231
Atlantic Coast Leopard Frog: 1
Pickerel Frog: 108
Northern Leopard Frog: 6
Wood Frog: 99
Spring Peeper: 37
Eastern Spadefoot: 9

Snakes
Northern Copperhead: 27
Northern Black Racer: 14
Timber Rattlesnake: 91
Northern Ring-necked Snake: 135
Eastern Hog-nosed Snake: 7
Eastern Milksnake: 69
Northern Watersnake: 89
Northern Rough Greensnake: 1
Smooth Greensnake: 21
Eastern Ratsnake: 106
Queensnake: 9
Eastern Massasauga Rattlesnake: 2
Northern Brownsnake: 33
Northern Red-bellied Snake: 69
Shorthead Gartersnake: 17
Eastern Gartersnake: 229
Common Ribbonsnake: 4
Northern Ribbonsnake: 1
Mountain Earthsnake: 6

Lizards
Northern Coal Skink: 8
Common Five-lined Skink: 23
Italian Wall Lizard*: 1
Eastern Fence Lizard: 9

Turtles
Eastern Spiny Softshell: 10
Common Snapping Turtle: 44
Midland Painted Turtle: 14
Eastern Painted Turtle: 28
Painted Turtle spp.: 38
Spotted Turtle: 3
Wood Turtle: 47
Bog Turtle: 1
Northern Map Turtle: 12
Northern Red-bellied Cooter: 3
Red-eared Slider*: 11
Yellow-bellied Slider*: 1
Eastern Musk Turtle: 9
Eastern Box Turtle: 59

*introduced species
Counting Costal Grooves on Salamanders

The adult forms of most Pennsylvania salamander species are easy to identify by sight, but a few can be confused with other species. In these cases it may be helpful to count costal grooves or costal folds to identify a salamander species accurately. Costal grooves are vertical creases in the sides between the axilla (armpits of the front legs) and groin (hind legs), marking the position of the ribs on most salamander species. Costal folds are the bulges of flesh between these grooves. Similarly, caudal grooves and folds can be found along the lateral regions of the tail. Generally, field guides and scientific keys recommend counting costal grooves, but some may give the costal fold count for certain species. In Pennsylvania only one salamander species lacks obvious costal or caudal grooves: the Red-spotted Newt (Notophthalmus viridescens). The adult forms of all other species have a certain number, or a certain range of numbers, of costal grooves.

Counting costal grooves and folds is not always easy, particularly with smaller specimens, and especially while in the field. The grooves in close proximity to the limbs can be especially difficult to see. Often it is necessary to view this region of the salamander at certain angles for all of the grooves to catch enough light to be seen, and of course salamanders rarely stay still for very long while being studied. Placing the specimen in the bottom of a small, clear plastic bag and folding it once can help temporarily immobilize the specimen for close inspection. Some scientific keys will give the ‘adpressed limb’ costal groove or costal fold count. This count is made by pressing the front and hind legs on one side against the specimen’s body; the front limb is held with the toes pointing towards the tail and the hind limbs pointing toward the head. The grooves or folds are then counted between the toes of the front foot and the toes of the rear foot. Any groove or fold which is touched by a toe is not counted. While this reduces the number of grooves or folds needing to be counted, it can be difficult to hold a live specimen in this position.

When counting costal grooves between adpressed limbs, any grooves which are touched by one of the toes should not be counted. In this drawing the costal groove count would be two.

...tips for improving field-herping skills
Counting Costal Grooves on Salamanders

It should be noted that often, the last groove is ‘Y’-shaped and is referred to as a ‘double groove’. The two prongs of the ‘Y’ are counted as two separate grooves. One of the best tools available for getting an accurate count is a digital camera with good macro capabilities. By photographing the specimen multiple times at different angles the surveyor should be able to attain a reasonable photo which highlights the costal grooves.

In our region, a good example of using a costal groove count to aid in salamander identification is to distinguish between a lead-phase Eastern Red-backed Salamander (Plethodon cinereus) and a Valley and Ridge Salamander (P. hoffmani). These two species can be notoriously similar in appearance and may both be present in the same landscapes of the Valley and Ridge province. Eastern Red-backed Salamanders have between 17-22 costal grooves but typically have 19. Valley and Ridge Salamanders typically have 20-21 grooves. If your specimen has fewer than 20 costal grooves, it is almost certainly a lead-phase Eastern Red-backed Salamander. If it has 20 or 21 costal grooves, you will need to look at other attributes. The Eastern Red-backed Salamander has a mottled venter which is roughly 50/50 black and white markings. The Valley and Ridge Salamander has a dark venter with just a sprinkling of white flecks, and an unmarked, white chin. While a costal groove count is not in and of itself definitive in species identification, proper identification can be arrived at with a fairly high degree of certainty when an accurate count is combined with other features typical of a particular species.

Valley and Ridge Salamanders (Plethodon hoffmani) typically have darker vents than Eastern Red-backed Salamanders (P. cinereus) on which the mottling usually occurs in a 50% light/50% dark ratio. Color in and of itself is not a reliable trait for identification; individuals can be highly variable. Valley and Ridge Salamanders are often described as having a contrasting lighter throat, but in the examples shown here the Eastern Red-backed Salamander specimen (right) has a whiter throat than the Valley and Ridge Salamander specimen (left). Photos: Ed Patterson
The PARS Experience

A new column for the PARS newsletter, 'The PARS Experience' illustrates the field survey as experienced by volunteers. This issue’s contribution is by Southwest Regional Coordinator, Ed Patterson.

“The Walk to Take Today”

November 30, 2014 – 1:30 p.m.
April 10, 2015 – 6:45 p.m.

“The place to observe nature is where you are; the walk to take today is the walk you took yesterday. You will not find the same things: both the observed and the observer have changed; the ship is on another tack in both cases.”

John Burroughs, ‘A Sharp Lookout’, 1877

Many people love to travel to exotic locations to experience new and different things; others realize that new and different things are often right outside their own doorstep - if they look closely enough.

John Burroughs, noted recorder of the everyday world of nature outside his own door, embraced the philosophy of ‘the universe in your backyard’. Most of his nature observations took place near his treasured cabin, Slabsides, in the Catskills, where he wrote about events in the natural world.

Working at Blue Spruce Park over nearly four decades, I have come to know the seasons: the calling of the wood frogs and spring peepers, the timing of wildflowers blooming; the leafing out and falling of leaves, the migration of songbirds and of the Monarch butterfly; and, in general, how the natural year evolves. Every so often something new appears, often when I look somewhere that I may have visited many times before.

I took advantage of some mild late November weather to search the ravines and seeps at the park for Spring Salamanders. Earlier in the year I thought I had spied a Spring Salamander in a hillside seep, but it slipped away before I could confirm the sighting - the Spring Salamander remained an unconfirmed species for the park.

Today was the day before the beginning of rifle deer season; there would not be many chances over the next few weeks to be safely in the woods. I decided to spend some extra time taking advantage of what would be one of the last remaining quiet days of the year.

In 2004 Indiana County acquired an additional 230 acres of land to add to the park. The added acreage increased the park to 650 acres in size, or a little more than one square mile. The acreage is almost entirely wooded, with some steep hillsides and ravines.

The surrounding hills are comprised of shale rock; as the rock is exposed and erodes, it tumbles down the ravines into the valley below. One ravine, in particular, has a small, unnamed stream that is rocky and very steep. I hoped that a Spring Salamander would be here, yet in the back of my mind I thought that this habitat also looked like an ideal place for Seal Salamanders, another species not documented in the park.

The steepest portion of the ravine yielded nothing. Making my way down the valley, I noticed a side seep that flowed into the main channel. These side seeps always seem to yield something. By late November small streams and seeps are covered with leaves, and searching for salamanders is more a matter of leaf raking than rock flipping.

Raking leaves at the tail end of the seep, I saw a small salamander with a distinctive orange pattern on its tail. I was able to capture it, and on closer examination I realized it was a juvenile Seal Salamander.
The PARS Experience

A new column for the PARS newsletter, 'The PARS Experience' illustrates the field survey as experienced by volunteers. This issue’s contribution is by Southwest Regional Coordinator, Ed Patterson.

Seal Salamanders are experts in home-cosmography. Most live their entire lives in very small home ranges, often traveling no more than a few feet from their streamside burrows. Most records for Seal Salamanders in Indiana County are from the Chestnut and Laurel Ridge areas in the southeastern corner of the county. There are, however, historic records of Seal Salamanders about two miles from this park.

The Spring Salamander remains undocumented; but on this day, on this walk, the Seal Salamander was added to the park's salamander list.

I did not find the Spring Salamanders I was originally looking for on this walk through part of my own home range; but as John Muir wrote, “In every walk with nature one receives far more than he seeks.”

Seal salamanders are known for having black toe tips which aids in their identification.

Postscript

I visited the ravine again on April 10, 2015 and managed to find a nice-sized adult Seal Salamander in the steepest part of this ravine. The population is isolated in a small area; but with appropriate protection, they should continue to survive here.

Seal Salamander (Desmognathus monticola)

I finished the walk grateful that Indiana County had acquired this property to preserve for the future. No one knew at the time of the property acquisition that Seal Salamanders lived here.

A 1939 aerial view of Blue Spruce Park. Before Indiana County’s 1966 acquisition of the property most of the land was used for farming and pasture land. The area where Seal Salamanders live, forested in 1939, remains
Don’t Drop the Rock!

As most field herpetologists know, many species are often found under cover objects such as rocks, logs, boards, sheet metal, and other forms of natural and artificial debris. Salamanders in particular are often found under logs and rocks in woodlands and along stream edges. When a specimen is found under a heavy object, great care should be exercised when returning the cover object to its original position. Always remove the specimen before carefully lowering the cover object back to the ground. As soon as you have your voucher photos, release the animal next to the cover object and let it escape beneath the object on its own. Never lower a cover object back down on top of a specimen - the slightest shift in the cover object or the substrate beneath it, or movement of the specimen while lowering the object, could result in crushing the animal. Always lower the object back down as slowly and gently as possible; there might be another individual, or eggs, hiding unseen below a thin layer of soil or debris - never let a cover object fall heavily back to the ground. Attempt to return the cover object back to its original position as much as possible - the animal chose that object because it suited its needs just the way it was.

....and Etiquette
PARS LEAGUE OF EXCEPTIONAL HERPERS

The column dedicated to recognition of noteworthy herping achievements and our wonderful volunteers. Recognitions based on highest number of observations, most significant observations, and other distinguished efforts.

Significant Finds

*Congratulations to the volunteers who documented some of Pennsylvania’s rare and difficult-to-find herp species during July, August & September 2015:*

Kenneth Anderson II: Coal Skink, Eastern Hellbender, Common Mudpuppy, Wehrle’s Salamander, Queensnake, Ribbonsnake, Northern Leopard Frog
Jason Beale: Eastern Hellbender
Brian Benner: Eastern Fence Lizard, Northern Copperhead
Ribello Bertoni: Coal Skink
Stan Boder: Eastern Massasauga
Chris Bortz: Wehrle’s Salamander, Smooth Greensnake
Andy Brookens: Eastern Spadefoot
Josh Brown: Mountain Earthsnake
Jacob Cramer: Valley and Ridge Salamander, Eastern Hog-nosed Snake, Northern Copperhead, Queensnake, Ribbonsnake
Jay Drasher: Eastern Fence Lizard, Northern Copperhead
Brandi Eberlin: Wehrle’s Salamander, Smooth Greensnake
M. Anne Ebenshade: Eastern Fence Lizard
Kyle Fawcett: Northern Copperhead
Bob Ferguson: Northern Copperhead, Smooth Greensnake
Stacy Foster: Northern Fence Lizard, Eastern Hellbender
Brian Hardiman: Smooth Greensnake, Ribbonsnake
Dave Hughes: Eastern Hog-nosed Snake, Northern Copperhead, Smooth Greensnake
Brandon Hunsberger: Coal Skink, Eastern Hellbender, Common Mudpuppy, Smooth Greensnake, Ribbonsnake, Mountain Earthsnake, Northern Leopard Frog
Mary Janecka: Queensnake
Matthew Justkowich: Northern Leopard Frog
Jim Kemper: Coal Skink, Wehrle’s Salamander, Mountain Earthsnake
Virginia Knapp: Smooth Greensnake
Mark Lethaby: Coal Skink, Eastern Hellbender, Common Mudpuppy, Northern Leopard Frog
Kyle Loucks: Eastern Hog-nosed Snake, Smooth Greensnake, Ribbonsnake
Scott Martin: Coal Skink, Ribbonsnake, Mountain Earthsnake, Spotted Turtle
Guy Mattola: Smooth Greensnake
Bruce McNaught: Northern Copperhead
Scott Pappentich: Northern Copperhead
Ed Patterson: Seal Salamander, Wehrle’s Salamander, Valley and Ridge Salamander, Smooth Greensnake, Queensnake
Gary Pluto: Northern Copperhead
Mitchell Rapp: Northern Copperhead
Thomas Reidenbaugh: Northern Rough Greensnake
Howard Reinert: Queensnake
Travis Russell: Eastern Fence Lizard, Valley and Ridge Salamander
Aaron Semasko: Northern Copperhead
Sam Silknetter: Northern Red-bellied Cooter
Gary Smith: Eastern Hellbender
Luke Smithson: Northern Red-bellied Cooter
Rich Soltesz: Smooth Greensnake
Stephen Staedtler: Marbled Salamander, Northern Red-bellied Cooter
Duane Stafford: Smooth Greensnake, Wehrle’s Salamander, Ribbonsnake
Matthew Stittler: Northern Copperhead
John Tautin: Common Mudpuppy, Northern Leopard Frog
Jaime Thomas: Queensnake
Aric Unrath: Queensnake, Northern Redbelly Cooter
Nick Wachter: Smooth Greensnake
Ben Walsh: Smooth Greensnake
Andy Weber: Eastern Fence Lizard, Eastern Hellbender, Seal Salamander, Wehrle’s Salamander, Smooth Greensnake, Queensnake, Ribbonsnake, Mountain Earthsnake

Block Masters

PARS volunteers who currently hold the top five slots for the most quad-blocks surveyed since the project launch.

*October 25, 2015 snapshot.*

Ken Anderson .................................................. 339 blocks
Kyle Loucks .................................................. 283 blocks
Scott Martin .................................................. 202 blocks
Kyle Fawcett .................................................. 181 blocks
Ed Patterson .................................................. 158 blocks

The 100 Club

PARS members who made over 100 documentations during July, August or September of 2015:

Ken Anderson: .......................... 168 records in July
.................................................. 142 records in Sept.
Brandi Eberlin: .................................. 152 records in July
Chris Bortz: .................................. 113 records in August
Brandon Hunsberger: .......................... 173 records in July
.................................................. 148 records in August
.................................................. 113 records in Sept.
Nate Nazdrowicz: .................................. 141 records in April
Kyle Loucks: .................................. 136 records in August
Ed Patterson: .................................. 114 records in July
.................................................. 144 records in August
.................................................. 127 records in Sept.
Duane Stafford: .................................. 114 records in July
.................................................. 122 records in August
.................................................. 155 records in Sept.

The Fantastic Five

PARS volunteers who have logged the most records since the launch of the PARS project on June 1, 2013 through June 30, 2015:

Ken Anderson ........................................ 2,310 Records
Duane Stafford ........................................... 2,274 Records
Brandon Hunsberger .................................. 1,992 Records
Ed Patterson ........................................ 1,819 Records
Bob Ferguson ........................................ 1,655 Records
Hi fellow herpers! I was born and raised in the North Central hills of Tioga County, PA. I was fortunate to have parents who at least tolerated if not encouraged a young lad who brought home various critters (frogs, toads, salamanders or snakes!).

I attended Cowanesque Valley Schools. My high school Biology teacher, Mr. Lester Smith, pushed me to attend college, and I thank him so much; I thought I wanted to be a dairy farmer. While at Mansfield University, I took a course in Ornithology and probably would have gone on to specialize in birds, but the next year (1969), a new professor, Dr. Russell Hall, came to Mansfield and offered a course in Herpetology. I loved the course, and Dr. Hall and I became friends and colleagues. That year I was the first person to find and report Wehrle's Salamanders in Tioga County. We conducted a study on Wehrle's and some other salamanders and had papers published in scientific journals!

When it became time to do my student teaching, Dr. Hall knew of an Earth and Space Science teacher in Corning, NY: a Mr. Jack Zellner who was also a herpetologist. He kept a collection of exotic snakes in his home and offered educational programs for schools, and along with his partner, Walter Young, worked the snake pit at the Morris Rattlesnake Hunt. Unfortunately, Jack died from a bite by an Eastern Diamondback Rattlesnake.

I needed credits to keep my teaching certificate valid, and Dr. Hall again came through with contacts at Texas A&M University. I spent 14 months there studying the effects of pesticides on snakes to earn a Master's degree! It would take years of research to prove a definite cause and effect. It seemed that live-bearers (especially watersnakes, cottonmouths and copperheads) were abundant in areas of high contamination but not the egg laying species, which were abundant in the control area of pastures and woods where no pesticides were used.

I resigned from teaching in 1976. We purchased a country grocery store/gas station, which we owned for twenty years, and I had a carpet cleaning business for 28 years; so I was out of the educational and scientific communities for many years.

I participated in the first PA herp atlas project, under Dr. Art Hulse, for approximately five years. In 2013 I participated in the Sinnemahonig Bioblitz as a herpetologist. Students from area schools, sometimes more than I felt comfortable taking out at once, were very enthusiastic about going herping. It was a great experience! It was at this Bioblitz that I met Marlin Corn and became involved with PARS.

This summer we camped in Benezette and met Ms. Stacy Foster, PARS Elk County Coordinator, who showed me around. We saw 16 different species, including 18 Timber Rattlers; the trip and Stacy were great! Later, Chris Bortz and his family spent a day herping with me in Tioga County, and Andy Weber attended my herp-blitz at my friend Bill Potter's property in McKean County. All were exceptional! Anyone who would like to come to my area and herp with me is more than welcome. I love meeting new friends and would be happy to show you around this area.

Three of our grand children, Kailey Wells and Alina and Syler Pietrzyk, love herping with me and that helps keep me motivated. In the past I have kept many snakes in captivity but now prefer to just observe and photograph herps in their natural environment with as little disturbance as possible. My favorites are the Smooth Greensnakes and Wehrle's Salamander! I am a competitive person and keep track of who is reporting what and from where on the PARS website.

I would be remiss to not mention that attending the 1st annual PARS meeting last March in Harrisburg was a great experience. It was like a reunion of old friends even though I had only met a couple of them before. Many people recognized my name and I recognized theirs.

Happy herping,
Duane
Perhaps no other figure has done more to elevate amphibians and reptiles to a higher status in the human perception, nor continues to influence American herpetologists directly than Roger Conant. His publication 'A Field Guide to Reptiles and Amphibians of Eastern and Central North America' is perhaps one of the most essential possessions of modern American herpetologists and naturalists, and continues to be relied upon more than any other publication for the identification of Eastern and Central North American species in the field. He is one of the best-known, and possibly the most influential, herpetologist of the twentieth century.

Born on May 6, 1909 in Mamaroneck, New York, Roger moved at the age of twelve to Red Bank, New Jersey with his mother, after the untimely death of his father. Soon afterwards, the experience of finding a copperhead at a Boy Scout camp ignited a life-long passion for herpetology; a passion he retained despite losing a thumb at the age of twenty as the result of a bite from a Speckled Rattlesnake (Crotalus mitchelli) he attempted to capture.

Landing a job at a local zoo at the age of sixteen, Roger soon realized that a career in zoology was his calling, and by the age of nineteen he attained the position of Curator of Reptiles at the Toledo Zoo in Ohio. He swiftly moved up through the ranks there and was offered the prestigious position of Curator of Reptiles at the renowned Philadelphia Zoo in 1935. He became the zoo's director in 1967; a position he held for the next six years. During his zoo career, Roger made a monumental impact on zoo-keeping by recognizing that animals needed to be kept in naturalistic displays rather than in sterile cages, both for the meaningful educational value to visitors and for the well-being of the animals. The changes he instituted eventually became the standard for zoos worldwide. He also brought the zoo experience into the home via airwaves for nearly 34 years with a weekly radio broadcast called ‘Let’s Visit the Zoo’ on Philadelphia KYW.

Roger Conant was far more than a zoo director during his years in Philadelphia, and his career was far from over after he retired from the zoo in 1973. He subsequently moved to the Southwest, where he served as an adjunct professor at the University of New Mexico, juggling this position with a robust and diverse career in herpetology. Throughout his life he was a devoted field herpetologist, conducting work in many parts of the world. His written publications range from the reptile merit badge pamphlet for the Boy Scouts of America, to landmark works on Thamnophis, Nerodia and Agkistrodon. Over the course of his life, Roger produced over 240 scientific papers and 12 books, and described 20 new species (mostly snakes). Because he knew and collaborated with many other significant herpetologists during his long life, Conant’s own autobiography essentially serves as a history book of 20th century herpetology.

He was President of the American Zoo and Aquarium Association (now the AZA, the world's foremost professional society for zoos and aquariums) for two years, and co-founded the Philadelphia Herpetological Society in 1952. He held numerous posts in the American Society of Ichthyologists and Herpetologists for over 30 years, becoming the organizations president in 1962. His large number of awards and recognitions include an honorary Doctor of Science degree from the University of Colorado, the Fourth Ingalls Award from the Cleveland Museum of Natural History, the Marlin Perkins Award, and in 1995, Nature Educator of the Year awarded to him by the Roger Tory Institute of Natural History. Seven species have been named in his honor, including three snakes and three salamanders. Roger remained active in the field of herpetology until the end, having described seven new sub-species of Mexican Gartersnake (Thamnophis eques) in 2003, the year he died.

Arguably his greatest achievement, the first edition publication of his reptile and amphibian field guide in 1958, was a watershed moment for American herpetology. It was the first herp field guide to be widely accessible to enthusiasts and is responsible for introducing countless young people to the fascinating and diverse beauty of amphibians and reptiles. Illustrated by his wife and soul-mate Isabel Hunt Conant (to whom the book is dedicated), the book has sold over a half million copies and is found in almost every nature center, school, and public library in Central and Eastern North America. It has also served as a model for field guides in other countries. Considered ‘the bible’ of amateur and professional field herpetologists alike, many of us own two copies: one for the desk and one for the field.
Species Spotlight

Eastern Cricket Frog
*Acris crepitans*

Range & Habitat: The current range of Eastern Cricket Frogs in Pennsylvania appears to be much reduced from its original range. Verified records have only been received from Bucks and Luzerne Counties since the launch of PARS. Historical records also exist for Allegheny, Berks, Cumberland, Dauphin, Delaware, Franklin, Philadelphia, Bucks, Chester, Carbon and Montgomery Counties. Ideal locations to search for this species include a variety of aquatic habitats with abundant emergent vegetation, such as swamps and bogs, or the shores and back water areas of ponds, lakes and slow-moving streams. Even flooded roadside ditches might harbor cricket frogs. Be on the lookout for Eastern Cricket Frogs from Franklin County east to Bucks County, and Luzerne/Carbon Counties south to the Maryland border.

Search Strategy: Northern Cricket Frogs are most easily found by listening for calling males. The call of a single male sounds similar to a pair of glass marbles being clicked together, slow to start but speeding up and continuing for 20-30 beats. In a breeding chorus, males may synchronize their calls to increase the carrying power of the sound. The species breeds from late-April to July in our region, and is largely diurnal in habits. As cold weather approaches Northern Cricket Frogs move into upland habitat in search of terrestrial hibernation sites.

Northern Cricket Frogs are small, warty, non-climbing members of the Treefrog Family. They occur in a dazzling variety of colors and patterns, often with bright splashes of light green, brown or orange. Most will have a dark, triangular mark between the eyes, and a longitudinal strip on the rear of the thigh. Cricket frog tadpoles are the only species with a black-tipped tail.
Most herp species found in Pennsylvania are easily identified by amateur herpetologists who have spent a little time in the field, but there are a few which can be frustrating at times, even for those with ample field experience. The three Pennsylvania salamander species from the Genus Desmognathus can be highly variable which can lead to misidentifications. Can you name the Desmognathid species in the photos below?
NAME THAT HERP:
Determining Desmognathids
NAME THAT HERP:
Determining Desmognathids

A. Northern Dusky Salamander
   Photo: M. Corn

B. Seal Salamander
   Photo: J. Poston

C. Northern Dusky Salamander
   Photo: E. Patterson

D. Allegheny Mountain Dusky
   Photo: M. Corn

E. Seal Salamander
   Photo: J. Poston

F. Allegheny Mountain Dusky
   Photo: E. Patterson

G. Northern Dusky Salamander
   Photo: E. Patterson

H. Allegheny Mountain Dusky
   Photo: E. Patterson

I. Seal Salamander
   Photo: E. Patterson

J. Seal Salamander
   Photo: E. Patterson

K. Allegheny Mountain Dusky
   Photo: E. Patterson

L. Northern Dusky Salamander
   Photo: E. Patterson
Preferably Alive

Plestiodon laticeps
A.K.A. Broad–headed skink

Only a handful of sites known from Chester, Lancaster, and York Counties. No York records since the launch of PARS.

Reward: Accolades of the herping community
Contact & Resource Information

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Recommended Web Sites:
Pennsylvania Amphibian and Reptile Survey (PARS): www.paherpsurvey.org
The Mid-Atlantic Center for Herpetology and Conservation (MACHAC): www.machac.org
Society for the Study of Amphibians and Reptiles: www.ssarherps.org
Northeastern Partners in Amphibian and Reptile Conservation: www.northeasparc.org
Maryland Amphibian and Reptile Atlas: www.marylandnaturalist.org