

**Alberta Conservation Association  
2010/11 Project Summary Report**

**Project Name:** *Wildlife Volunteer Program*

**Wildlife Program Manager:** Doug Manzer

**Project Leader:** Kris Kendell

**Primary ACA staff on project:**

Kris Kendell, Stefanie van Huystee, Shevenell Webb and Karl Zimmer

### **Partnerships**

Alberta Sustainable Resource Development  
TD Friends of the Environment Foundation

### **Key Findings**

- We increased the awareness of amphibians and reptiles and their conservation needs with 43 individuals, organizations and families through distribution of outreach materials.
- Through volunteer participation, we contributed data on 196 amphibian observations and 23 reptile observations to help biologists better understand the distribution of herpetofauna in Alberta.
- Volunteers provided information on 4 snake hibernacula (den) locations that are difficult to identify and crucial snake habitat.
- Over 800 individuals, families, organizations and groups are currently on the mailing list for the program's biannual newsletter *Croaks and Trills*.

### **Introduction**

Throughout history, amateur citizen scientists have contributed to the advancement of conservation through their volunteer activities. We believe the use of volunteers as part of Alberta Conservation Association (ACA) projects will be mutually beneficial to both the volunteer and ACA. Through volunteering, individuals will be provided the opportunity to improve their skill-set, increase their knowledge of conservation issues and network with wildlife professionals, while at the same time ACA will be able to increase our capacity to deliver our wildlife projects.

Currently, our largest wildlife volunteer component is the Alberta Volunteer Amphibian Monitoring Program (AVAMP), a long-term community survey of amphibians. Participants of this program assist biologists with the detection of new amphibian and reptile populations in the province. Data collected by volunteers contribute to an increased understanding of the distribution of Alberta's amphibian and reptile species and are used, along with other data, to

assist in updating the general status of amphibians and reptiles in Alberta (Alberta Sustainable Resource Development 2005).

## **Methods**

We surveyed ACA Wildlife Program staff using a simple questionnaire to better understand the projects that would lend well to volunteer involvement. We also reviewed internal policies and procedures and determined the requirements associated with volunteer participation projects.

For the AVAMP program, we provided participants a peer-reviewed identification and monitoring manual and a CD featuring the calls of the frogs and toads of Alberta. A dedicated toll-free phone number (1-877-777-FROG) and email is available for participants to contact the program co-ordinator. We distributed *Croaks and Trills*, the program's biannual newsletter, to help increase awareness of amphibians and reptiles and to assist in maintaining relationships with program volunteers and other interested parties.

At sites of their own choice, we encouraged volunteers to listen for calling frogs and toads in the spring and search for individual amphibians during the spring, summer and early fall. The time and effort volunteers put into the program was entirely up to them. We reviewed, verified and compiled the volunteer observations and then forwarded them to Alberta Sustainable Resource Development for entry into the Fish and Wildlife Management Information System.

## **Results**

We canvassed internal wildlife staff to gauge their interest and possible opportunities for engaging volunteers with our work. The majority of replies felt ACA would benefit from the use of volunteers on the projects they are involved with. During our review of ACA policies we found no barriers for using volunteers on ACA projects, and minimal effort is required from staff to provide a safe and meaningful experience for volunteers.

In 2010, 43 individuals, families, organizations and/or groups signed up to become members of AVAMP, bringing the total number of program members to over 800. All program members received the biannual newsletter, *Croaks and Trills*. AVAMP participants submitted a total of 196 amphibian and 23 reptile observations; including 4 snake hibernacula (den) locations. Data submitted by volunteers represented 100% of the amphibian and 88% of the reptile species native to the province (Table 1).

## **Conclusions**

The majority of ACA wildlife staff felt that they could benefit from the use of volunteers on their projects. Key issues to ensuring effective volunteer participation centred on meaningful time commitments from volunteers and streamlining the training process. The use of volunteers benefits ACA through increased project delivery capacity and benefits the volunteer through increased skill development, better understanding of conservation issues and programming, and the ability to network with wildlife professionals.

The AVAMP is an example of a network of enthusiastic volunteers that positively impact conservation through their activities. Data collected by program participants are used by biologists to better understand the distribution and status of Alberta's amphibians and reptiles, an important first step in many herpetofauna conservation initiatives in the province.

### **Communications**

- Presentation (Invited) – Leo Nickerson Elementary School, St. Albert, Alberta. June 1, 2010.
- Presentation (Invited) – Edmonton Catholic Schools district-wide development, science support at your fingertips. St. Mary Elementary School, Edmonton, Alberta. May 13, 2010.
- Newsletter article – Backyard safety considerations for your amphibian neighbours: swimming pools and mowing the lawn. 2010. In: *Croaks and Trills* (15)1.
- Newsletter article – “Alien” turtle found in Alberta. 2010. In: *Croaks and Trills* 15(1).
- Conference poster presentation – 24th International Congress for Conservation Biology. Alberta Volunteer Amphibian Monitoring Program. Edmonton, Alberta. July 5 – 7, 2010.

### **Literature Cited**

Alberta Sustainable Resource Development. 2005. The General Status of Alberta Wild Species 2005. Alberta Sustainable Resource Development, Fish and Wildlife Service, Edmonton, Alberta. [Online] [www3.gov.ab.ca/srd/fw/speciesatrisk/index](http://www3.gov.ab.ca/srd/fw/speciesatrisk/index)

Photos:

The Alberta Volunteer Amphibian Monitoring Program logo captures the essence of the volunteer program; signifying discovery and exploration of the natural world, particularly of amphibians and wetlands.

A Columbia spotted frog (*Rana luteiventris*) basks on the shore of a pond in southwestern Alberta. (Photo: Kris Kendell)

The wandering garter snake (*Thamnophis elegans*) is one of three species of garter snakes found in the province. Alberta Volunteer Amphibian Monitoring Program participants often submit observations of reptiles, such as garter snakes and their den locations, along with their amphibian observations. (Photo: Kris Kendell)