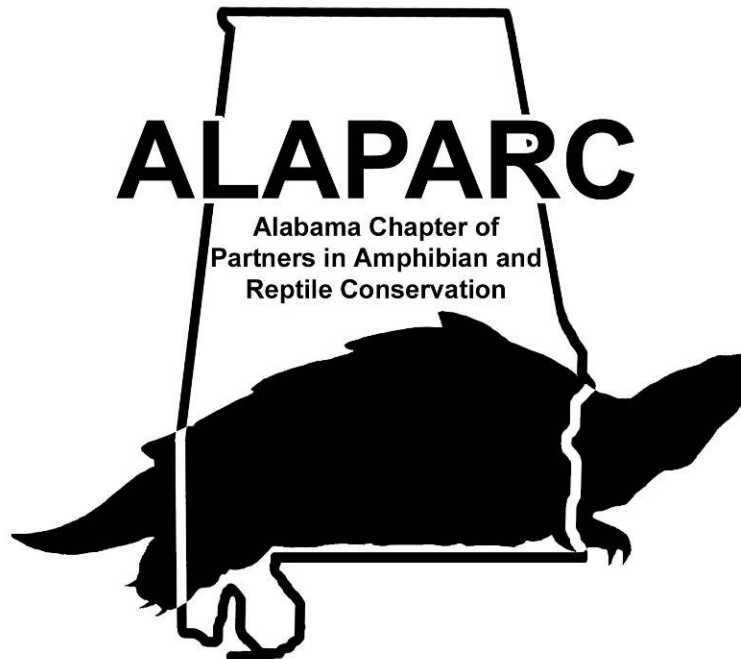


ALAPARC NEWSLETTER

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A note from the Co-Chairs



Hello all,

It's only been less than a year since ALAPARC was first conceptualized on the long drive back from the 2009 Southeast PARC meeting in North Carolina. It should be frankly noted that much of our early motivation was derived from the revelation that Georgia was in the early stages of forming their own state chapter. Much has come together since that time, culminating in ALAPARC's first meeting at the Solon Dixon Forestry Education Center in Andalusia, Alabama, attended by 80 people, while Georgia is still apparently in the concept phase. The point here is not to disparage our neighbor to the east, though it's almost as fun as rooting against the University of Alabama (did you see how Heisman Trophy winner Mark Ingram fared against Auburn's defensive line?); the point is that Alabama is fortunate to have a strong group of enthusiastic individuals passionate about the state's amphibians and reptiles and eager to work to conserve them.

We don't need money, we don't need institutional support, what we need, and what we have, is motivation and the spirit of collaboration. I'm proud of the progress we're seeing, from working to determine the status of hellbenders and gopher frogs in Alabama, to establishing a network of environmental programs in the state, to simply informing others of current research and conservation programs at our meetings. This progress isn't occurring because of an organization, it's happening because individuals decided to get involved and work towards conserving amphibians and reptiles in Alabama.

I hope this trend continues. It'd be insincere of me to say I don't spend some time worrying about the future of ALAPARC. Without funding to provide for permanent positions, our chapter relies wholly on volunteers. That's why I urge you to contact us if you'd like to get involved. We've got a great group together (<http://www.alaparc.org/people.html>); a group that's been responsible for the early success of our chapter. But we know there are other people out there that can offer ALAPARC their expertise and enthusiasm (see also our call for co-chair nominations in this issue).

In any case, I see much to be excited about in the coming year. As you'll read about in this issue, there has been significant progress in the development of our conservation initiatives. Also, Katie Dunn has joined our team as Public Relations Officer and is working to raise our chapter's profile among the general public, a demographic that is essential in establishing partnerships for effective conservation. By distributing press releases about our progress to the media, many will learn of our work. Finally, we are looking forward to our second annual meeting, which will once again occur at the Solon Dixon Forestry Education Center. We are sympathetic to some of the concerns raised about having a more centralized location for our meeting, and we anticipate this concern will be addressed in the future. Sean and I have seen how SEPARC struggles every year to identify meeting hosts and how much time and effort is required to reinvent the wheel again and again; we feel our time is better spent elsewhere. However, we look forward to attending meetings in different locations, planned by future co-chairs. We anticipate our 2010 meeting will be another memorable event and we're working to line up workshops, debates, and awards to complement the research talks of the type we heard in 2009. Mark your calendar for November 5-7th. This is your chapter and we're looking forward to working with you.

Until then, raise a glass to Leslie Hubricht, who 50 years ago this June discovered Alabama's state amphibian, the endemic Red Hills Salamander.

Dave Steen

Co-Chair, ALAPARC



Fall 2009 Meeting Summary

We held our inaugural meeting on November 6-8, 2009 at the Solon Dixon Forestry Education Center in Andalusia, Alabama, and we are so pleased with the outcome. Our weekend and our meeting kicked off Friday night at our welcome social, where a good time and tasty food were had by all. Saturday morning's talks began with a welcome by Co-Chair David Steen, with photos of beautiful environments and imperiled amphibians and reptiles from throughout the state. Our invited speakers gave us inspiration for the conservation road ahead. Among several esteemed individuals, this session included Matt Aresco, who gave an inspiring account of his odyssey to protect turtles in Florida and Alabama. Ken Dodd, who has strived for conservation causes throughout his long tenure in the southeast, provided sobering news regarding the Flattened Musk Turtle and Red Hills Salamander.



Attendees of the Inaugural ALAPARC Meeting held at the Solon Dixon Center take time out to pose for a historic picture commemorating the event. Photo courtesy of Kenneth Dodd

Three ALAPARC initiatives were officially announced and a lively discussion of the current status of Alabama hellbenders ensued. It is clear that the gopher frog, hellbender, and education/outreach initiatives will each get underway very soon, and many interested parties have exchanged information and emails to get the ball rolling on the three initiatives. Linda Weir provided a background of the North American Amphibian Monitoring Program and highlighted how Alabama represented a gap in coverage.

Saturday neared conclusion with a simultaneously entertaining and shocking presentation by Michael Bloxom, an Alabama wildlife law enforcement official, who chronicled his years busting bad guys selling illegally collected reptiles. Shawn Jacobsen finished the day with a tribute to George Folkerts, infusing many with a renewed respect for this Alabama conservation champion. We enjoyed a delicious southern fried seafood feast on Saturday night which was made by the skilled chefs at the Dixon Center and provided by a generous donation by Project Orianne.

Day three of the meeting was composed of submitted research talks and the audience was thrilled by the diversity of research and conservation efforts in the state. Some of the talks included Thane Wibbels' report of the past, present, and future of Alabama terrapins, Chris Thawley's interesting report on niche modeling in non-native frogs, Samantha Collin's report on canebrake reproduction, and Bill Sutton's reports on post-fire effects in the Bankhead National Forest, among many other excellent talks. Check out the [meeting program](#) for abstracts of all the presentations.

After closing words from Sean, we enjoyed another terrific lunch from the Dixon Center and a group photo. Sadness over leaving was tempered by the hope of good things to come, a renewed sense of purpose, and the prospect of returning next year to be together again and see what we found in our dipnets since we last met.

Save the Date!

Second Annual ALAPARC Meeting

November 5-7, 2010
Solon Dixon Forestry Education Center
Andalusia, Alabama.

Go to <http://www.alaparc.org/meetings.html> for more information

Initiatives News

Hellbender Initiative

The ALAPARC Alabama Hellbender Initiative (ALAPARCAHI) has already had early and unexpected success. The first phase of the conceived initiative is to solicit information from individuals in professional or academic settings that may have information about unverified hellbenders found in the state recently. Due to the efforts of ALAPARC members Eric Soerhen and George Cline, we now have two verified photos and locality information for two recently-observed hellbenders. Eric Soerhen reached out to several state malacologists and stream ecologists to solicit information about recent hellbender sightings, and one of them had a photograph of a specimen found alive in a Flint River tributary in 1999. Although George's Dismals Canyon specimen (a dead specimen kept in a freezer for an unknown period of time) lacks specific data, we know it was photographed in 2006. The most electrifying development was talk at the 2009 ALAPARC meeting of a hellbender found dead in 2004 near Florence that had apparently been preserved! After contacting Tom Haggerty at the University of North Alabama (UNA), we were able to have the specimen sent to us and it is now curated at the Auburn University Herpetological Collections. This specimen represents the most recent verified hellbender in Alabama, and it is very recent indeed. Thus, the first of our efforts has renewed our hope that our initiative will actually document living hellbenders in Alabama, and has definitely increased the probability that a healthy population may be located.



Flint River Hellbender from 1999

Interested volunteer groups are forming for the first surveys which are expected to begin in spring. Fortunately, Tom Haggerty and other folks at UNA are interested in surveying the nice streams in their own back yard near Florence, and this will free up other parties who would have otherwise had to drive all the way to those sites. Bill Sutton and company (of Alabama A&M) have agreed to survey the Flint and its tributary. Eric Soerhen is going to take a section of shoals near Florence that he has a good feeling about. Jimmy and Sierra Stiles will be in north Alabama this summer doing research, and they have agreed to get into additional creeks not covered by other teams. This leaves me with the Bear Creek drainage, which has had recent confirmed

hellbenders reported from a survey in Mississippi. There are still other localities available, and volunteers can contact me to cover them.



This 2004 specimen from Lauderdale County represents the most recent verified Alabama Hellbender.

A hellbender-specific grant has been applied for, in hopes that each survey group may be assigned a few traps purchased by the grant for passive sampling conducted in conjunction with the more labor-intensive wading/rock turning surveys already scheduled. Data sheets and instructions for standardizing methods are being worked up and will be ready for the spring. Dave Steen has been hard at work putting together an educational flier to be distributed to north Alabama fishing spots and bait shops, hopefully using funds secured by the grant.

All told, this promises to be an exciting year for hellbender conservation in Alabama, and hopefully we can maintain the momentum we've already generated!!!!

Education/Outreach News

Ongoing Initiatives

ALAPARC is currently seeking volunteers to contribute to the Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources' *Outdoor Alabama* series on herps found within the state. ALAPARC is working with ALDCNR to use these species profiles as our fact sheets. However, many of the species in Alabama currently lack a profile on [ALDCNR's site](#). We've been able to contribute 8 new species profiles to the series so far, but there are still over 40 species (mostly amphibians) that need a profile written.

Feel free to browse the profiles currently online on the ALAPARC website (http://alaparc.org/species_list.html) to see which species are currently lacking info. If the profile of "your" species is blank, please consider helping out! Creating a species profile takes only a few minutes, is a great way to give back to ALDCNR for generously letting us link to their website, and goes a long way to creating the informed public base

we need for effective herp conservation here in the state. If you're interested in helping out, shoot Wally Smith an email at whsmith1@crimson.ua.edu for more info.

Upcoming Initiatives

ALAPARC is going to be partnering with the [Environmental Education Association of Alabama's](#) teacher workshops in 2010. This is a project being spearheaded by our own Jimmy Stiles and is centered at providing Alabama educators with the materials and knowledge needed to infuse more herps in their science curriculum.

The first workshop will take place this spring at the Solon Dixon Forestry Education Center in Andalusia, Alabama on Saturday, **March 13, 2010**. This workshop, which starts at 9:00 am and ends at 2:30 pm, includes content information and current research in the region from a Herpetologist, hands-on experience with live animals, and classroom activities relating to the animals, habitat and conservation.

We'll be providing more info on how ALAPARC members can help later on down the road. For now, keep an eye on your email, the [ALAPARC website](#), [Facebook](#) group, and [our blog](#) for information as it becomes available.

Public Relations News

Alabama Herp Stories Sought

Have an intriguing story idea for a profile on one of Alabama's resident amphibians or reptiles? Know of a conservation initiative that would benefit from a better knowledge and understanding outside the scientific world? Then ALAPARC wants your ideas.

Establishing a working relationship with the general public is an integral piece in furthering ALAPARC's mission to conserve Alabama's amphibian and reptile populations.

Sending these stories to media outlets throughout the state will help bring attention not only to ALAPARC, but also to the species it aims to protect.

Please send story ideas to Katie Dunn (our ALAPARC Public Relations Officer) at kdunn013@gmail.com with "ALAPARC story ideas" in the subject line. Please also include a detailed description of the idea.

Getting Involved/Upcoming events

2010 ALAPARC Meeting Date Set

Here we go again; it's time to start planning for our 2010 Annual Meeting. Missed our 2009 meeting? Don't make the same mistake again and mark your calendars for **November 5-7, 2010** at the Solon Dixon Forestry Education Center in Andalusia, Alabama.

Expect more great talks about the conservation of Alabama's amphibians and reptiles as well as some new features, including debates and the debut of special award session to commemorate pioneers in Alabama herpetology.

We will also hear about how our initiatives have progressed over the last year and hopefully hear from some of you about additional conservation efforts.

ALAPARC needs you!

Interested in the conservation of Alabama's amphibians and reptiles? Want to organize a meeting, guide the direction of and head up a statewide network of motivated individuals? Alabama Partners in Amphibian and Reptile Conservation is looking for individuals to become future co-chairs. In the last year, we established ALAPARC and got the ball rolling; now it's time for others to step and keep the momentum going. We will not succeed and persist unless we have motivated and enthusiastic volunteers. You don't need a resume, you need a passion. Does this sound like you?

Have questions? Let us know at AlabamaPARC@gmail.com. ALAPARC needs you! Know of someone else that fits the bill? Nominate them.

Alabama Herp Pictures Sought

Do you have the definitive photo of one of Alabama's herps? Do you have a great shot of herp habitat or people herping? Have a picture with a herp story behind it? If so and you are willing to share, send it our way. We would love to have a few great pictures showcasing Alabama's amphibians and reptiles to use on our website and/or in future editions of the ALAPARC newsletter.

If you have some photos you are willing to share with us, email them to our webmasters Laura and David Laurencio at norops@auburn.edu. Include ALAPARC photos in the title.

2010 SEPARC Meeting

The 2010 Southeast Partners in Amphibian and Reptile Conservation (SEPARC) Meeting is quickly approaching. It will be held on **February 18-21, 2010** at Camp Ocala in Florida.

The 2010 SEPARC meeting will be at [Camp Ocala](#) in the Ocala National Forest near De Land, Florida. This site will be great in terms of providing a lot of opportunities for networking with fellow members, as all meeting events and lodging are in one central location. It also boasts affordable pricing and great herping! We have a variety of symposium session topics, a poster session, workshops, task team meetings, fieldtrips, and much more! A banquet celebration is planned, as well as an evening social during the poster session. We look forward to seeing you in February!

[From the SEPARC website]

For more information on the 2010 SEPARC meeting including the meeting program, a list of who is attending, available field trips and registration information see the [SEPARC website](#) at www.separc.org.

The Gopher Tortoise Council is coming to Alabama

Our very own ALAPARC co-chair David Steen also serves as co-chair of [The Gopher Tortoise Council \(GTC\)](#) and he is proud to bring the GTC annual meeting to Alabama in 2010. The meeting will be held **October 7-10, 2010** at the [Alabama 4-H Center](#) in Columbiana, Alabama. This is a great opportunity for ALAPARC members to learn more about a regional conservation organization that's been working to protect the gopher tortoise and its habitats for over thirty years. Registration and other information will be provided in the coming months over at the [GTC website](#) but for now, mark the date on your calendars.

Alabama Herps in the News

UAB RESEARCHERS AIM TO KEEP RARE DIAMONDBACK TURTLES OFF ENDANGERED SPECIES LIST

Birmingham News

Here's a link to a news item about Dr. Wibbels' (and others) terrapin research at UAB

<http://www.al.com/news/birminghamnews/statebriefs.ssf?/base/news/1253434547181550.xml&coll=2>

GOPHER TORTOISE CONSERVATION BANK ESTABLISHED IN MISSISSIPPI

Westervelt Ecological Services Press Release

Chickasawhay Conservation Bank in Greene County, Mississippi, was the first bank of its kind entitled in Mississippi under new federal guidelines on September 17, 2009. Two-hundred and fifty tortoises from Southeast Alabama and Southwest Mississippi will join remnant tortoise over the life of the project to repopulate in a longleaf pine habitat covering 1,220 acres. [Summary from Westervelt Ecological Services Press Release]

For more information on the Chickasawhay Conservation Bank read the entire press release at the [Westervelt Ecological Services website](#).

Alabama Herp Publications

Below is a partial list of recent publications of possible interest to ALAPARC members. Check them out!

Koons, D. N., R. D. Birkhead, S.M. Boback, M.I. Williams, M.P. Greene. 2009. The effect of body size on cottonmouth (*Agkistrodon piscivorus*) survival, recapture probability, and behavior in an Alabama swamp. *Herpetological Conservation and Biology* 4(2): 221-235.

- Graham, S. P., S. K. Hoss, R. D. Birkhead, C. K. Ward, D. A. Steen, K. M. Gray, R. H. Mount. 2009. One hundred and one new county records of Alabama amphibians and reptiles. *Herpetological Review* 40(3): 367-371.
- Johnson, V. M., C. Guyer, S. M. Hermann, J. Eubanks, and W. K. Michener. 2009. Patterns of dispersion and burrow use support scramble competition polygyny in *Gopherus polyphemus*. *Herpetologica* 65(2): 214-218.
- Richter, S. C., B. I. Crother, and R. E. Broughton. 2009. Genetic consequences of population reduction and geographic isolation in the critically endangered frog, *Rana sevosa*. *Copeia* 2009(4):799-806. [Note: talks about Alabama]
- Garner, J. T., S. W. McGregor, T. A. Tarpley, and M. L. Buntin. 2009. Freshwater mussels (Unionidae) in the headwaters of Chipola River, Houston County, Alabama. *Southeastern Naturalist* 8(4):687-694. [Note: could be good herp habitat]
- Meade, M., J. O'Kelley, G. Scull, and J. Turner. 2009. Fish assemblages in Talladega National Forest's Choccolocco, Shoal, and Scarbrough Creeks. *Southeastern Naturalist* 8(4):677-686. [Note: could be good herp habitat]



Stay Connected

Our official website, blog, Facebook page and Flickr photostream are continually being updated. Check them all out and come back often to stay abreast of ALAPARC news, initiatives, and opportunities to get involved.

ALAPARC Website:

<http://www.alaparc.org>

ALAPARC Blog:

<http://www.alaparc.blogspot.com/>

ALAPARC on Facebook:

<http://www.facebook.com/photo.php?pid=38282613&id=29703411#/pages/ALAPARC/175617587967?ref=ts>

The ALAPARC Flickr Photostream:

<http://www.flickr.com/alaparc>



Alabama PARC (www.alaparc.org) is chaired by David Steen and Sean Graham and is a chapter within Southeast PARC (SEPARC) co-chaired by Betty Crump and Gabrielle Graeter. For more information about SE PARC visit www.separc.org. For more information about PARC, visit www.parcplace.org.