

Arkansas wildlife gets report card at conference

BY ALDEMARO ROMERO
SPECIAL TO THE SUN

Arkansas wildlife was the subject of a statewide conference recently. The meeting was the Arkansas Wildlife Action Plan Conference and was organized by the Arkansas Game and Fish Commission. It gathered scores of researchers and administrators from numerous federal and state agencies, state universities and conservation organizations. This gathering took place in Mount Magazine State Park Lodge near Paris on Sept. 4-5.

The participants gave 24 presentations about their findings and research needs for better understanding and protecting Arkansas' biodiversity.

The major contingent of presenters came from Arkansas State University. Six faculty members and a dozen graduate students were involved in 10 of the 24 presentations at the meeting.

Dr. Ronald Johnson, professor in the Department of Biological Sciences, talked

about some studies he conducted together with some of his colleagues in order to understand the genetic structure of the Illinois chorus frogs and the yellow-cheek darters in Arkansas. Both species have suffered serious declines in their populations statewide and may become locally extinct if no appropriate action is taken soon.

Dr. Stanley Trauth, also a professor in the Department of Biological Sciences at ASU, talked about the re-

sults that he and his graduate student, Jonathan Stanley, obtained studying the distribution of the queen snake in Arkansas, another species of conservation concern because its population in Arkansas is isolated and has not shown any increase in numbers or range since 1991.

Trauth's former student, Dr. Benjamin Wheeler, addressed issues regarding the long-term monitoring of the endangered Ozark hellbender, a species show-

ing a serious decline in the last few decades. He also presented the results of a study carried out together with other ASU colleagues about the abundance of crayfish, mussels and aquatic salamanders in the Spring River. According to this study the population of salamanders in the Spring River is extremely small.

Dr. Jim Bednarz, the director of the Wildlife Program at ASU, talked about a

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The Ozark hellbender salamander is one of the most endangered species in Arkansas, and its future was discussed in a recent statewide conference.

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study that he and some of his graduate students conducted about the distribution and population status of another important species in Arkansas: the Swainson's warblers. According to this research frequent floodings may lead to a significant decrease in the populations of these birds.

Dr. Thomas Risch, associate professor at ASU, presented the results that he and his student, Matthew Connor, obtained studying the Ozark pocket gopher. They concluded that although this species is considered an agricultural pest, it plays an important role in creating underground habitats for amphibian, reptile and small mammal species.

David Hayes, a graduate student at ASU and his adviser, Dr. Alan Christian, presented the results of their study about the distribution of freshwater snails from the Ozark mountain region. This study provides the basis not only to know about the diversity of these mollusks in Arkansas but also about their conserva-

tion status.

Another ASU graduate student, Scott Chiavacci, presented a proposal prepared by him and his collaborators on how to increase the reproductive success of the Mississippi kite and to re-establish a viable breeding population of swallow-tailed kites in Arkansas.

Finally, the author of this article presented the results of his studies on the conservation status of the southern cavefish in Arkansas and concluded that this species does not face an immediate danger in the state but recommended some monitoring actions in order to preserve its habitat.

These presentations were followed by a number of meetings in which conservation steps were recommended for state funding in order to preserve the biological jewels of The Natural State.

For more information, contact the ASU Department of Biological Sciences at biology@astate.edu.

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