

Midwest Partners in Amphibian and Reptile Conservation (MWPARC) Student Travel Grant Report

Awardee: Benjamin Genter
Professional association: High School student in southern Indiana

In one or two paragraphs, describe the work you participated in that was facilitated by this award.

In the late spring and summer of 2023, I had the opportunity to utilize funds from the Midwest PARC Fueling Student Field Experience Award. These funds supported my work investigating the presence and prevalence of Snake Fungal Disease (SFD) in the state-endangered Kirtland's Snake, *Clonophis kirtlandii*. Given the species' vulnerability, largely due to habitat loss and degradation, it is crucial to understand if SFD poses a threat to *C. kirtlandii*. Using the funds from the travel grant, I conducted extensive field surveys across central and northern Indiana for *C. kirtlandii*. These surveys involved laying artificial cover at sites where *C. kirtlandii* was known and in new sites where populations are believed to occur. Cover objects were checked multiple times throughout the field season. Each snake encountered was swabbed for SFD and uniquely marked with a medical cautery unit. In addition to collecting swabs to better understand the presence of SFD in this species, observations I made of *C. kirtlandii* contribute to our understanding of their distribution across Indiana.



How has this work aided you in achieving your career goals?

This project has been a formative experience and has aided me greatly in advancing my career goals, particularly because it provided me with hands-on experience designing a survey and conducting fieldwork. Through this fieldwork, I faced challenging situations that forced me to stay flexible, develop problem-solving skills, and adapt. Additionally, I will soon learn qPCR techniques to process the SFD swabs that I collected over the summer, which will be another useful skill that I gained as a result of this project. These foundational skills will be invaluable in my future academic and professional pursuits, including in other research projects. I am immensely thankful to Midwest PARC for their support of my project through this award, which has made this fieldwork possible.