Midwest PARC Quarterly Newsletter - July 2025

Compiled by members of the **Outreach and Communications Team (OCT)**
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Herp Highlight: Cope's Gray Treefrog and Gray Treefrog

On the warm summer nights in July, just after a rainstorm has passed through, the fireflies begin to light up the night sky, and the sound of laughter drifts away from a backyard barbecue. The air is thick and humid. Just as things begin to quiet down, a sharp trill echoes from the trees above—followed by another in the distance. This is the call of one of the Midwest's two most beautiful treefrogs and the focus of this newsletter's Herp Highlight: the Gray Treefrog (*Dryophytes versicolor*) and Cope's Gray Treefrog (*Dryophytes chrysoscelis*).

These are the largest treefrog species found in the northern Midwest, typically measuring 1–2 inches (3–4 cm) in length (Amphibians of Ohio 2013). It's difficult to describe their coloration precisely—because they can actually change color in response to their surroundings and behavioral cues. Despite this variability, both species usually display blotchy patterns on their backs that

resemble lichen, helping them blend into the bark and leaves of trees (Smithsonian's National Zoo). This camouflage can be so effective that you might walk right past one without even noticing!

While the upper and outer surfaces of the skin are dark and blotchy, the undersides of the legs are a sharp contrast. The skin here is a bright yellow/orange coloration and serves as a warning to predators that these frogs are toxic and should not be eaten (Smithsonian's National Zoo).

This Herp Highlight is unique in that we're featuring two species—but in many ways, Gray and Cope's Gray Treefrogs can be regarded as one. They share the same breeding season and look virtually the same in appearance. In fact, without genetic analysis, there are only two reliable ways to tell them apart: their calls and their geographic range. Gray Treefrogs have a slow, lower-pitched trill, while Cope's Gray Treefrogs produce a faster, higher-pitched call (Virginia Herpetological Society).

Gray Treefrogs are more commonly found in the northern and eastern regions of the Midwest, including Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Minnesota, Ohio, Wisconsin, and parts of eastern Missouri. Cope's Gray Treefrogs, on the other hand, are more dominant in the southern and western areas, including parts of Illinois, Indiana, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, and even into North and South Dakota (Missouri Department of Conservation).

Next time you find yourself outside on a hot humid night, stop and take a moment to see if you can hear the peaceful trills of the Midwest's beautiful tree frogs!

Works Cited

Ohio Department of Natural Resources, Division of Wildlife. Amphibians of Ohio Field Guide. Publication 348, Ohio Department of Natural Resources, 2013.
Gray Tree Frog. Smithsonian's National Zoo and Conservation Biology Institute, Smithsonian Institution, n.d., nationalzoo.si.edu/animals/gray-tree-frog.
Gray Treefrog. Virginia Herpetological Society, n.d., virginiaherpetologicalsociety.com/amphibians/frogsandtoads/gray-treefrog/index.php.
Cope's Gray Treefrog. Virginia Herpetological Society, n.d., virginiaherpetologicalsociety.com/amphibians/frogsandtoads/copes-gray-treefrog/index.php.
Gray Treefrog and Cope's Gray Treefrog. Missouri Department of Conservation, Missouri Department of Conservation, n.d., mdc.mo.gov/discover-nature/field-guide/gray-treefrog-copes-gray-treefrog.

Image Description: A Cope's Gray Treefrog (*Dryophytes chrysoscelis*) uses its circular toe pads to climb a tree. It's blotchy coloration and bumpy skin allows the frog to camouflage against the tree. Photo courtesy of Liam Feeney.

2025 MWPARC Annual Meeting Announcement

Mark your calendars! This year's MWPARC Annual Meeting will be co-hosted with the Kansas Herpetological Society! This year's meeting will be held November 7-9 (location TBD). MWPARC will be hosting a workshop at this event.

Keep an eye on the KHS website and the MWPARC website for more details, coming soon!

Blanding's Turtles Released in Iowa!

In exciting conservation news, 56 Blanding's Turtle (*Emydoidea blandingii*) hatchlings were recently released in central Iowa. This collaborative project between the Iowa Department of Natural Resources, the Blank Park Zoo, and Iowa State University allowed for the hatchlings to get a head start in life. These hatchlings were raised in the Blank Park Zoo over the winter, enabling them to grow larger before their release. The larger size of these head-started hatchlings make it more difficult for natural predators to eat them.

These hatchlings were released with radio transmitters, allowing researchers to track their movements. A team of researchers will track the hatchlings daily until July, providing important information about the habits of this species.

Image Description: Young Blanding's Turtle (*Emydoidea blandingii*) being held by a scientist above a grassy background. Photo courtesy of Autumn Baker.

Wisconsin Wetland Science Conference 2026: call for symposia

The Wisconsin Wetlands Association is soliciting proposals for symposia, roundtables, working groups, and workshops for their 2026 meeting! The 2026 Wetland Science Conference will be held February 24-26, 2026, in Baraboo, WI.

This conference highlights the environmental, socio-cultural, and economic value of wetlands and promotes the latest research on, and techniques for, wetland and watershed planning, restoration, and management. Symposia could include oral presentations, panel discussions, and/or open discussions regarding special topics that support the overall conference theme. All symposia should further information sharing and collaboration on current critical wetland issues. This may include important research on amphibians and reptiles.

If you have an idea for a symposia that fits this year's theme, or if you want to learn more about this conference, please take a look at the website. All proposals are due by **September 29, 2025**.

A call for oral and poster presentation abstracts will be issued in September 2025.

Photo Call!

Attention all photographers! Are your friends and family bored of seeing your field photos? We would love to see them! MWPARC is seeking photograph submissions of midwestern amphibians and reptiles for use in our outreach materials.

You can submit photos using the QR code or by visiting the Google form. This one-stop-shop makes it easy to give us permission to use your images and to bulk upload photographs. Your submission will be directly linked to the images you upload so we can include all image credits for the photographs you provide when published.

Image Description: A black and white QR code that links to the google form to submit your images of midwestern amphibians and reptiles: https://forms.gle/d4kQzEmLv3Z2kiG29.

Fueling Student Travel Award Announcement

Congratulations! MPWARC is excited to announce the winners of the 2025 Fueling Student Travel Awards! This year's recipients include graduate and undergraduate researchers conducting research across the Midwest. Stay tuned to learn more about the projects completed by our awardees:

- Donovan Capet, recent graduate, Aurora University
- Kevin Green, undergraduate, Eastern New Mexico University
- Caleb Krueger, graduate, Michigan State University
- Tayci Sullivan, graduate, Southern Illinois University

More information about current and previous recipients of this award can be found on the MWPARC Awards page.

Advisory Board: Get to Know Them!

Tricia Markle is a new member to the MWPARC Advisory Board! Tricia is a Conservation Research Scientist at the Minnesota Zoo. Her work includes leading the zoo's Freshwater Turtle Conservation Program. This program includes boosting wild populations of threatened Wood Turtles (*Glyptemys insculpta*) and Blanding's Turtles (*Emydoidea blandingii*) through researching their habitat needs, nest protection, headstarting, and road mortality mitigation. Previously, as a graduate student, her research focused on salamander range limits and understanding the impacts of climate change.

Image description: Tricia Markle, MWPARC Advisory Board Member, smiling while holding a Blanding's Turtle (*Emydoidea blandingii*) which has a transmitter on its carapace. Image courtesy of Tricia Markle.

Stories From the Field

Elizabeth Shaffer

My name is Elizabeth Shaffer, and I'm a master's student at Ohio University working under Dr. Sean Giery. I'm researching how fish presence in vernal ponds affects various processes/elements via amphibian linkages. Primarily, I'm interested in the effects on (1) terrestrial leaf litter decomposition through a fish/amphibian/insect food chain pathway, (2) terrestrial predator visitations to the pond, and (3) the total amphibian community composition in and out of the pond. We hypothesize that fish presence should reduce or eliminate amphibian presence at ponds, which would lead to increased rate of leaf litter decomposition, fewer predator species and visitations, and a less diverse amphibian community. I'm doing both aquatic and terrestrial sampling and have set up leaf litter bags and trail cameras at ponds--some with fish, some without--scattered throughout a small section of southeastern Ohio to try to capture these phenomena.

Image description: Elizabeth and an undergraduate student sampling a vernal pool for amphibian larvae in late spring. Photo courtesy of Elizabeth Shaffer.

Stories From the Field Submission: Do you have a story to share? Submit your story here!

Check Out Your State

Midwest PARC has launched a new set of state resource pages under the Region tab on the website. State pages serve as a home for resources for those interested about herpetology in each state. Information ranges from educational (state herps, museum collections, and lists field guides) to regulatory resources, management plans, and community science programs.

Did you know the Black Racer, *Coluber constrictor constrictor*, is the state reptile of Ohio?

Have you thought about getting involved with community science in Illinois?

Are you prepared for your next herping trip in Kansas? Be sure to check out their Laws Pertaining to Field Herping!

Or maybe you just want to learn more about the states and species that make up MWPARC. Hop on over to our State Pages!

***Image description**: The Region Tab of MWPARC's website displaying an outline of each of the twelve states in our region as a selectable link to each state's resource page.*

2025 Meetings and Conferences

Mark your calendars!

Joint Meeting of Ichthyologists and Herpetologists - **July 9-13** in **St. Paul, MN**.

23rd Annual Symposium on the Conservation and Biology of Tortoises and Freshwater Turtles - **July 20-25** in **Chattanooga, TN**.

SWPARC Annual Meeting - **August 7-10** in **Albuquerque, NM**.

NEPARC Annual Meeting - **August 10-12th** at the Poconos Environmental Education Center in **Dingmans Ferry, PA**.

MWPARC Annual Meeting and Kansas Herp Society Annual Meeting - **November 7-9**, location to be announced. MWPARC is teaming up with the Kansas Herp Society!

SEPARC Annual Meeting - **January 30-February 1** in **Black Mountain, NC**. This year's theme is Resilience: Recovery after Disturbance.

Wisconsin Wetland Science Conference - **February 24-26, 2026** in **Baraboo, WI**. Symposia proposals are currently being accepted, oral and poster abstracts will be solicited in September 2025.

Third Global Amphibian and Reptile Disease (GARD) Meeting - **June 8-12** in **Knoxville, TN**. Updated information will be coming soon to the website!

Hot Off the Presses! - Recent Publications and Other News

Scientific Journal Articles Featuring Herps in the Midwest

Microhabitat Use by Disjunct Common Five-Lined Skink (Plestiodon fasciatus) Populations at Their Northwestern Range Extent. Researchers studied a northern population of Common Five-lined Skinks (Plestiodon fasciatus) in Minnesota's Upper Minnesota River Valley to understand how habitat management affects their abundance. They found that skinks were most abundant where large downed woody debris was present and negatively affected by dense canopy, high herbaceous cover, and invasive Buckthorn. After habitat treatments, skink detections increased by 97–188%. The study highlights the need for reptile-focused management and offers clear habitat guidelines to improve conservation outcomes in northern landscapes.

Gelvin-Innvaer, Lisa, et al. "Microhabitat Use by Disjunct Common Five-Lined Skink (Plestiodon fasciatus) Populations at Their Northwestern Range Extent." Herpetologica, vol. 81, no. 2, 23 Apr. 2025. https://meridian.allenpress.com/herpetologica/article/81/2/152/506622/Microhabitat-Use-by-Disjunct-Common-Five-Lined

The distribution of (Batrachochytrium dendrobatidis) in amphibians of Erie County, Ohio. A recent study investigated the presence of the chytrid fungus (Batrachochytrium dendrobatidis, or Bd) in Erie County, Ohio, where no prior public data existed. Researchers conducted nocturnal amphibian surveys at nine sites, collecting both swab and water samples for Bd detection using real-time PCR. Bd was detected at all sites and across all four amphibian species encountered, indicating that the fungus is widespread in the area. These findings highlight the urgent need for continued monitoring and species-specific research to guide amphibian conservation efforts in northern Ohio.

Boutell, Kate, and Andrew Pike. "The Distribution of Batrachochytrium dendrobatidis in Amphibians of Erie County, Ohio." Undergraduate Research Symposium, Oberlin College, 25 Apr. 2025. https://digitalcommons.oberlin.edu/researchsymp/2025/posters/4/

In Early May, the Population and Community Ecology (PACE) Lab at the Illinois Natural History Survey/ University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, concluded year 26 of a long term mark recapture study on the Eastern Massasauga Rattlesnake (*Sistrurus catenatus*) in Illinois. Important life history, behavioral, environmental and genetics data was collected from 82 unique individuals and will be used to further the species conservation in the state.

Want to see your research highlighted? Have you recently published on populations of amphibians or reptiles in the Midwest? We want to hear about it! Please reach out to **Liam Feeney** (ohioherping@gmail.com) and **Danielle Galvin** (dgalvin2@utk.edu) if you would like to highlight your research.

***Image description**: Field researchers from the Population and Community Ecology Lab capturing an Eastern Massasauga Rattlesnake (*Sistrurus catenatus*). Image courtesy of Joey Cannizzaro.*

Header photo description: A Cope's Gray Treefrog *(Dryophytes chrysoscelis)* found upright on a warm June night. The frog has descended closer to the water to find a potential mate. Photo courtesy of Liam Feeney.

We want your feedback: What would you like to see in future volumes of our newsletter? Give us more information by filling out this survey: https://forms.gle/Hz9ZknEFfiTE8a48

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