

Briefing on the development of the Wildlife Phenology Program

Introduction – The development of the Wildlife Phenology Program (WPP) began in November 2008. It is a collaborative effort of the USA National Phenology Network (USA-NPN), The Wildlife Society (TWS), USGS, and US Fish and Wildlife Service. The program will encourage observers to submit new and historical observations of animal phenology, including bird migrations, frog calling, and butterfly emergence. The WPP will be accessible to a wide range of observers, from beginners to professionals. We plan to release the beta version of the WPP on the USA-NPN website during the spring of 2010. The WPP complements the existing USA-NPN Plant Phenology Program, and we plan to integrate the two programs in a seamless manner.

Partnerships – A critical aspect of the WPP is the establishment of partnerships with existing monitoring programs, management agencies, researchers, educators, and other stakeholders. We are establishing partnerships with key organizations, such as the Association for Fish and Wildlife Agencies, Cornell Lab of Ornithology, Association for Zoos and Aquariums, and many other organizations, monitoring programs, and individuals. With some programs, such as the USGS North American Bird Phenology Program, we are going beyond partnership and are coordinating with them to merge their monitoring and data acquisition efforts with our own.

Species selection – In partnership with NatureServe, we developed a set of criteria for selecting species to monitor. We used these criteria to develop a list of approximately 160 species of national or broad regional interest, and sent the criteria and species list for review over 100 experts. As a part of the review process, the reviewers are suggesting species of regional or local interest that should be added to the list in the future. Ultimately, we plan to allow and encourage the observation of species of national, regional, and local interest.

Protocol development – We are working with NatureServe to develop protocols for observing species. Once developed, we will submit these protocols to external review. We are also working closely with existing monitoring programs, such as eBird, Frogwatch USA, and Project Butterfly WINGS to ensure that all of our protocols are integrated appropriately. We plan to incorporate these programs into the USA-NPN online system, facilitate information sharing and growth, coordinate activities, and avoid duplication when possible. For example, we will direct beginner observers to existing programs aimed at them. However, we will also provide methods for beginners to submit data through the USA-NPN website, particularly when existing programs are not available. In all cases, we will encourage the sharing of data among monitoring programs and will provide these data through the USA-NPN website.

Pilots – We are pursuing pilot programs to test our observation protocols and investigate how they might be best implemented in a park or reserve setting. In the Northeast, we are working with a consortium of organizations, including the National Park Service and the Appalachian Mountain Club, to test the integration of novice and professional-level observations. In the Southwest, we are collaborating with the US Fish and Wildlife Service, Project BudBurst, and University of California-Santa Barbara to test methods for novice-level observations.

Contact: Abraham Miller-Rushing, WPP Coordinator, The Wildlife Society and USA National Phenology Network, Phone: 617-875-7847, Email: abe@wildlife.org