

May 2018 Featured Expert: *Christopher Smith*

I happily introduce Christopher E. Smith who is a herpetologist and Director of Public Affairs for HerpMapper.org (@HerpMapper) for the past 4 1/2 years. You can follow him on Twitter @FieldEcology. Learn more about what he does below and help me welcome him to The People and Nature Connection. - Kirsten



TPNC: What does a typical work day look like for someone in your position?

Smith: My time is split between the office and the field. Much of my time is spent interacting with field herpers, agency biologists, and the general public that actively participate in community science (citizen science). HerpMapper's primary goal is to get high-quality herp data into the hands of conservation and research organizations.



HerpMapper

I also spend time in the field collecting data that is entered into HerpMapper. Much of my time is spent in Minnesota and the surrounding Midwest states, but I do occasionally travel to other

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states within the U.S., and even to other countries.

TPNC: What do you like about your job?

Smith: The best part of my job at HerpMapper is facilitating the collection of amphibian and reptile observational data, and getting those data into the hands of agency, university, and NGO biologists that use these data for on-the-ground conservation action. A great example of this is the Minnesota Turtle Crossing Tally and Count Project (<https://www.mnherps.com/projects>) – this project documents and monitors turtle crossing and mortality hotspots with the specific goal of implementing data-driven mitigation strategies to help conserve Minnesota's turtles and other small species of wildlife.



TPNC: What do you find challenging about your job?

HerpMapper is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization, and is a labor of love for all those involved. It would be great to reward and compensate volunteers that contribute large amounts of their time and energy to the project. Increased funding would also allow HerpMapper to more quickly



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adopt new features to benefit its users. To donate to HerpMapper please visit: <https://www.herpmapper.org/donate>

TPNC: What types of classes did you have to take in college to get your position?

Smith: I have a bachelor's degree in fisheries and wildlife management with a minor in biology, and a master's degree in conservation biology, with a minor in entomology – both from the University of Minnesota – Twin Cities. It's important to take broad selection of courses in school. Many students studying natural resource-related sciences prefer to be outdoors interacting with plants and wildlife, but it's important to also take courses that prepare students for working with people in complex public and private organizations. Courses in public speaking, conflict resolution, public or private business administration, accounting, etc. should be embraced.

TPNC: What is your favorite aspect of nature?



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Smith: I enjoy traveling, observing, and photographing wildlife in their natural habitat. I especially like to search for amphibians, reptiles, and invertebrates – organisms that many try to avoid. The natural world is filled with a diverse mix of creatures, many of which remain un- or understudied by scientists.

TPNC: What is the biggest misconception you would like the public to know about what you do?

Smith: There are many misconceptions about what wildlife scientists do, due in large part to sensational television shows and movies. While wildlife scientists typically enjoy their work, the work often includes long hours and working conditions that can be tough to endure (e.g., heat/cold, parasites, difficult terrain, etc.). Many also spend long hours in front of the computer analyzing data, writing reports and publications, and grant proposals.



Thanks to Christopher for sharing your work!