



F  **E E D**

**TORONTO
ZOO**

2023

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

To spend a whole weekend at the Zoo, sleeping overnight just a few paces from lions, hippos and rhinos sounds like the plot of a childhood dream. Yet during the weekend of **May 12-14th, 2023**, we got the chance to do just that! FREED and the Toronto Zoo hosted 18 Indigenous, Black and/or Racialized students and 15 leaders, instructors and speakers at the Bush Camp for FREED's first event of the year. The jam-packed activity days were filled with naturalist workshops led by enthusiastic graduate students and early career professionals. In their free time, students got a chance to explore the Zoo and wonder at animals from all over the world. During FREED they gained a deeper understanding and awe for the flora and fauna native to southern Ontario.

Your generous financial and in-kind contributions allowed us to achieve the following:

- Cover room and board for 18 students and 15 leaders, instructors and speakers. This also included nightly campfire smores, and many students' first BeaverTail!
- Give each student a combined \$75 subsidy to assist with transportation and equipment purchases to facilitate increased access for the event.
- Give each student a small kit including a daypack, headlamps, field notebooks, and more!
- Host 9 workshops, talks and discussions with experts from across the conservation sector who taught new field techniques and shared their stories about fieldwork and beyond.
- Hire a photographer who documented the event by capturing stunning photos
- Provide honorariums for the FREED organizational committee to recognize their months-long effort in planning this event.
- Buy materials for long-term use across FREED events and help build an inventory library with 10 waders, 10 sleeping bags, 5 pillows and blankets, 5 raincoats, 1 projector and screen, 2 bluetooth speakers, 4 walkie talkies, and more!

In conversations with students as they reflected on their weekend experience, they highlighted how this opportunity facilitated many firsts - first overnight camping, first smores, first time in waders, first fieldwork experience. Many students remarked how this FREED event gave them more appreciation for the realities of fieldwork as well as fostering (and in some cases rekindling) their connection to nature. **This would not have been possible without your collaboration.**

From the very bottom of our fieldwork-full hearts,
Alannah, Reta, Jonathan, Mariel and Aranya





All photo credits go to Blue BMK (<https://www.blue-mbk.com/>)

EVENT SUMMARY

On Friday, students settled into the Bush Camp and had a chance to explore the Zoo. During dinner, **FREED co-directors, Mariel Terebiznik (Ontario Parks) and Aranya Iyer (WWF-Canada)**, led a safety talk covering basic precautions during fieldwork as well as what fieldwork experiences may look like for people with different identities. Following dinner was a campfire where **Reta Meng (McMaster leader)** and Aranya co-led a session on the importance of two-eyed seeing and weaving knowledge systems in ecological research, which focuses on establishing relationships with the land and communities researchers are working with. Reta read aloud a passage from *Braiding Sweetgrass* by **Robin Wall Kimmerer**, (“Asters & Goldenrod”). These ideas were reinforced during the campfire on the second night when Aranya led the group to analyze **Margaret Noodin’s** poem, *Landing here*. Students reflected on the importance of Indigenous languages and ways of knowing, and how natural history, story-telling and poetry can be weaved together to create a beautiful and informative avenue for connecting to the land. At the end of the event, students were encouraged to consider how the weekend had changed or modified their connection to the land and with each other, while also sharing the experiences and moments that resonated the most with them.



Despite a late night, most students and instructors woke up early on Saturday for an optional beginner's birding hike co-led by avid birders **Reta Meng** and **Jonathan Chu**, PhD candidates from **McMaster** and **Guelph University** respectively. Here, students learned how to use binoculars, field guides, and general birding tips, they even heard a wood thrush during the hike! During breakfast, Dionne Daley who is the co-founder of [BIPOC Outdoor Gear Library](#) came to give a talk on the importance of increasing access to local green spaces for BIPOC communities. BIPOC Outdoor Gear Library also graciously donated waders, hiking shoes, and sleeping bags for use throughout the event to increase comfort during the chilly nights and keep dry and active during the daytime!



With our bellies full, **Mariah Ramlogan**, **Simón Caneo**, and **Nicole Woolley** from **Parks Canada** then led a workshop covering long term ecological integrity monitoring. They set up three rotating stations near Weston Pond and covered skills like forest bird surveys, amphibian surveys, and water quality monitoring. Students got a chance to learn about the importance of collecting indicators that can help us track ecosystem health as well as gathering baseline data and structuring protocol to build upon for years to come.



Next, students had a chance to put on some waders (many for the first time!) and go to Rouge National Urban Park for a Blanding's Turtle monitoring workshop. Co-led by **Christine Drader and Rachelle Fortier of Adopt-A-Pond**, students learned the importance of turtle monitoring and conservation, and participated in turtle tracking and trapping exercises. In total we caught 5 turtles, and students helped collect data that the Toronto Zoo will use to assess their conservation efforts. Students also practiced safe handling techniques of a Blanding's Turtle and each got a photo with their new turtle friends!



After dinnertime, **Linda Zou from Toronto and Region Conservation Authority**, led a workshop on Bats and Owls. Students huddled together in our makeshift presentation tent for a comprehensive session on key identifiable characteristics of these nocturnal species. Afterwards, students went on a walk and learned the basics of ethical playback for owl surveys. They also got a chance to work with bat detectors. A group even stayed back after that night's campfire to take a short walk and use the detectors for a self-guided bat-walk under the stars!





On Sunday morning, **Alannah Grant (Guelph leader), PhD student and founder of CitiSci schools**, gave a crash course on telemetry and tracking. Students got a chance to partake in a scavenger hunt for “bears, squirrels, and bunnies” (tagged stuffies hidden around Bush Camp). Students also got hands-on experience setting up radio telemetry equipment as well as the joys of in-field troubleshooting around landscape, elusive tracking subjects and “tricky bounces”. Afterwards, students celebrated their success with a group photo featuring one of the tagged telemetry subjects that they lovingly named “Honey” the bear.

The final workshop of the weekend was led by **Sally Ju of Environment and Climate Change Canada**. Sally gave a talk covering basic principles of stream sampling on Saturday and on Sunday, with live specimens from a wetland in the Zoo, students got to use microscopes to look at aquatic invertebrates up close. Students immediately used terminology from Sally’s talk to start identifying insects and pointed out key anatomical traits, aided by **Alannah Lymburner of the Native Bat Conservation Program!** Despite the past few long days in the sun, students were engaged and excited about seeing water bugs do their silly dances under the microscope.





We are so excited to see how students apply these skills in their future courses and how they continue building their network within FREED to access opportunities to grow alongside the field of ecology, evolution and conservation. None of these workshops would have been possible without the incredible investment from individual instructors and their organizations who committed their time and resources to helping us make fieldwork more accessible for BIPOC undergraduate students. We are so humbled by the outpouring of support for our event and we cannot wait to see what adventures await just beyond the horizon!



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THANK YOU!



toronto ZOO

- CHRISTINE DRADER, RACHELLE FORTIER, DONNELL GASBARRIN ADOPT-A-POND
- CRYSTAL COWIE - TURTLE ISLAND CONSERVATION STEWARD
- TOBY THORNE, ALANNAH LYMBURNER - NATIVE BAT CONSERVATION PROGRAM
- MARY-KATE WHIBBS- SPECIES RECOVERY BRANCH
- BUSH CAMP AND COMPASS CATERING



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