

2025 Bob Hatcher Award: Dr. Danny Bryan



Danny started his academic career at Motlow State Community College, where he earned an Associates of Science Degree before moving to Knoxville and earning a B.S. in Plant and Soil Science at the University of Tennessee. He received a graduate teaching assistantship at Middle Tennessee State University which allowed him to complete his master's thesis on the growth rates and mortalities

of dogwood trees relative to orientation with the magnetohydrodynamic coal-fired facility in Tullahoma. After his MS work, he took an instructor position at Martin Methodist College in Pulaski which allowed him to teach zoology and microbiology courses. He then moved to Cumberland University where he worked his way up the academic ranks as a biology professor. While teaching at Cumberland, he completed his Ph.D. in Environmental Science at Tennessee Tech which focused on the survival and natural history of the timber rattlesnake at Center Hill Lake in Dekalb County, TN.

In his 29 years at Cumberland University Danny taught an incredible breadth of courses on a number of topics in biology from flowering botany to vertebrate biology. He helped foster internship and directed research opportunities for a number of undergraduates. Danny was a cornerstone of the Science Department at Cumberland. He worked to maintain accreditation for biology courses and led the department as program director for nearly a decade. His dedication to the sciences and his work to help grow enrollment at Cumberland led to his appointment as Emeritus Professor of Biology in 2023. Aside from his academic duties at Cumberland University, Danny was the head wrestling coach. In 2024 he was inducted into the Cumberland University Sports Hall of Fame.

Danny is perhaps the most vocal advocate for timber rattlesnakes in the state of Tennessee. He has been working to understand the distribution, habitat preferences, ecology, and population health of Tennessee timbers for decades. In his work at Center Hill Lake, he was the first researcher to detect *Chrysosporium* in Tennessee which was later reclassified as the fungal

pathogen *Ophidiomyces ophiodiicola*. Danny consulted with the Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency about the presence and effects of the disease and later authored a technical report for monitoring the disease. Additionally, Danny co-authored the Tennessee chapter in The Timber Rattlesnake: Life History, Distribution, Status, and Conservation Action Plan. This tome was a major effort sponsored the Partners in Amphibian and Reptile Conservation group in 2021.

Danny expanded his research on timber rattlesnakes by tracking and monitoring individuals at the Bridgestone Reserve at Chestnut Mountain which is managed by the Nature Conservancy. It was during this research that one of the most impactful events in Danny's career occurred, he was envenomated by one of his research animals. In the true form of a pure educator, he used his bite as a teaching opportunity. Danny delivered many presentations, news media and podcast interviews about his envenomation and recovery. Danny helped raise snakebite awareness, while also promoting personal responsibility and stressing the importance of rattlesnake conservation.

Danny was a founding member of the Tennessee Herpetological Society and since the beginning he has been an active member of the group that has helped to guide and solidify the trajectory of the society. His service to the THS includes election to the board as Middle TN rep, vice president, and member at large, membership on the Chadwick Lewis Scholarship Committee, service on the conservation committee, and a position on the editorial board for the Tennessee Journal of Herpetology. He also served as host for the Annual Meeting in 2005 and 2011.

It is difficult to overstate how vital Danny Bryan has been to the Tennessee herpetological community. Danny's involvement as an educator, researcher, and advocate for Tennessee herpetofauna has cemented his legacy as a dedicated herpetologist. Because of this, we feel that he is an ideal candidate for the Bob Hatcher Conservation Award. Danny is the Tennessee "Rattlesnake Man" and mention of his name is synonymous with advocacy and conservation of timber rattlesnakes in the state. Over Danny's vast career he has worked to promote the Tennessee Herpetological Society's mission of educating the public and working hard to study and conserve reptiles and amphibians.

Michael Fulbright, Cumberland University; **Lisa Powers**, Froghaven Farm