

## Conservancy of Southwest Florida Cane Toad Pilot Project

In response to a request for “community involvement” that came through the Pelican Bay Presidents Council, this morning (Tuesday) I met with Melinda Schuman, Biologist, Conservancy of Southwest Florida. Melinda is program manager for a pilot project to test the efficacy of trapping cane toads, an invasive species in this region.

Melinda’s current research partner, Dr. Benjamin Muller is from Australia and is collaborating while at the University of Florida. The ongoing cane toad research effort at the Conservancy is supported by private donations.

Through the research to date, two significant discoveries regarding the cane toads in SW Florida have been made: 1) These toads do not “migrate” as the ones in Australia have demonstrated. They are “homebodies” and are very happy and committed to remain here. 2) The male mating call of the cane toads in SW Florida differs from that of the Australian cane toads. This is significant because the basis for this latest project’s success to lure female toads into a trap is their attraction to the recorded mating call of the males.

Since it is known that the mating seasons for cane toads is late spring to early summer, it is desirable to begin the pilot project soon, hopefully by the middle of April. By design, 4 cane toad traps will be strategically placed in Pelican Bay. Criteria for placement includes the need for proximity to water, presence of cane toads, and distance from other local traps due to possibility of mating call “confusion”. Our back yard which butts up to the golf course and is near a pond was deemed desirable and thought to work well as a trap location. Once initiated, it will be monitored daily and remain in service for a month. Melinda will collect the trapped toads and measure the degree of success in trapping as a function of mating call variability. She plans to have 3 additional traps in Pelican Bay for the study.

The traps that will be used were invented by Dr. Muller and were obtained through his Australian business relationships. They are not available for purchase here in the U.S. Known as the Toadinator® Cane Toad Trap, they are compact, lightweight, portable, and easy to assemble. You can find the product brochure on-line as well as a You Tube video demonstrating their use.

B. S. Duncan, PhD 3/24/2020