

Learning to Love Reptiles and Amphibians

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Project Motivation & Goals

There are many different perspectives on herpetoculture and entomoculture, or the keeping of live reptiles, amphibians, and insects in captivity, whether as a hobby, for education, or as a commercial breeding operation. Through environmental education, this project explores the ethics of these various perspectives with a focus on the following topics of interest:



Dusky salamander found during Bioblitz activity.

- Examining environmental impact with regard to invasive species
- Exploring conflicting perspectives on reptile, amphibian, and insect husbandry
- Expanding people's schema and understanding of the ecological and educational value of reptiles, amphibians, and insects, endemic and not endemic.
- Fostering a lasting, intergenerational love of both native and exotic animals

Project Steps

Planning and Preparation

- Developing a lesson plan in collaboration with Dr. Kealoha Freidenburg from Yale University
- Learning about exotic animals as service animals during an Animal Assisted Interventions course at Southern Connecticut University

Bioblitz with NatureYear

- **Location:** Outdoor classroom at Common Ground High School
- **Audience:** 14 NatureYear students (4-6 years old)
- **Activity:** Survey for and identify amphibian, reptile, and insect species using critter keepers, magnifying glasses, and the Seek app by iNaturalist



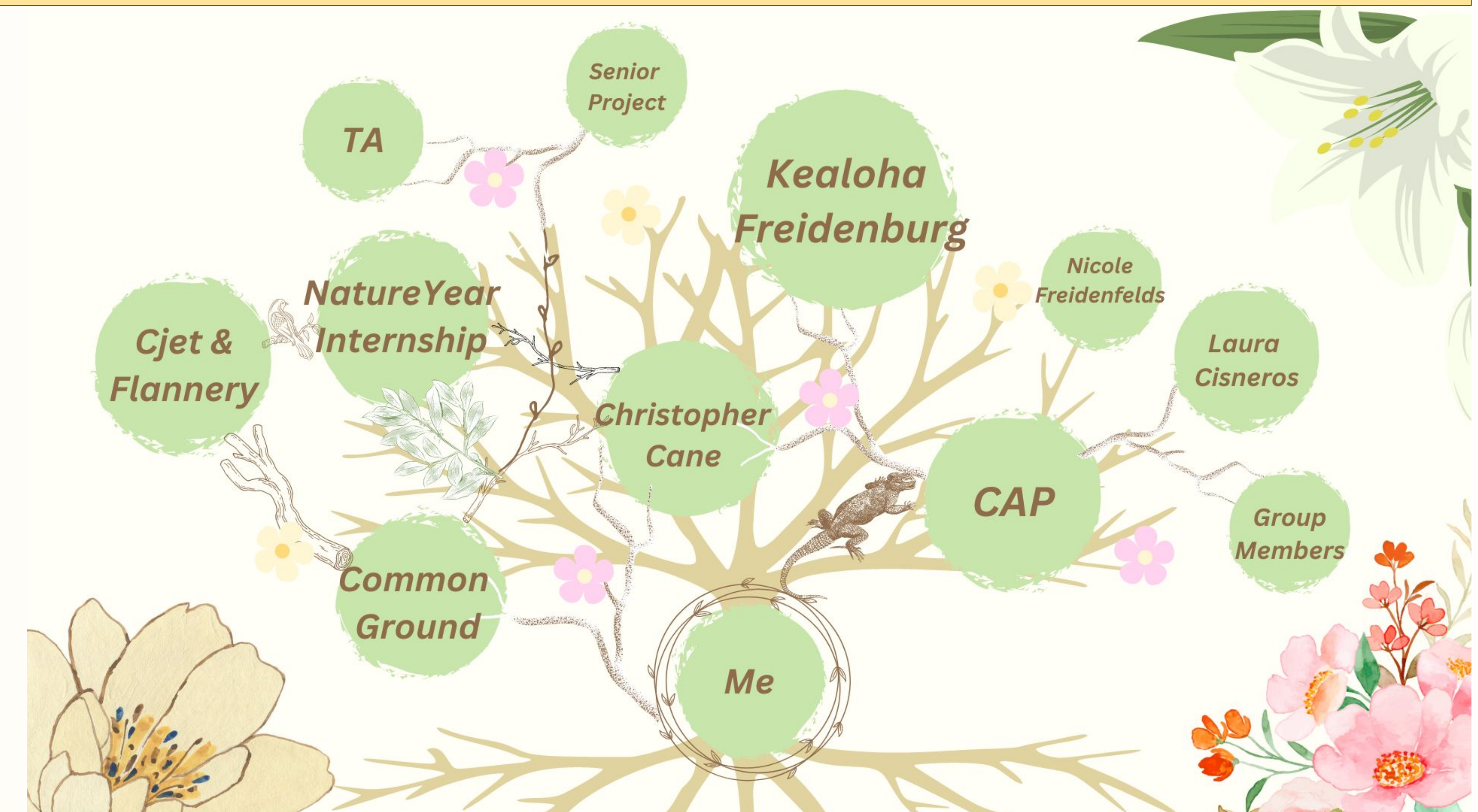
Reptile Evolution Activity

- **Location:** Farm House classroom at Common Ground High School
- **Audience:** 3 NatureYear students (11-13 years old)
- **Activity:** Learn about the amazing evolution of reptiles and their spectacular adaptations



Community Partnership

- Located in New Haven, CT, Common Ground is an urban farm and environmental education center, in addition to a high school serving approximately 230 students from diverse backgrounds.
- My former teacher, Christopher Cane introduced me to Kealoha Freidenburg, a herpetologist (amphibian and reptile expert) at Yale, who helped me develop the educational curriculum for this project.
- I interned with Common Ground's NatureYear program, which brings together a small community of children (ages 5-13+) and Teacher Naturalists (Flannery and Cjet) to explore, imagine, and learn on the farm and in the forest.
- My senior project connects to these topics and builds off the successful activities I've already completed. In addition to my CAP project...
 - I co-taught NatureYear students with Cjet about frogs at our local vernal pool.
 - I will work with Ranger Harry from the City of New Haven Youth & Recreation Department to educate my school on reptiles and amphibians.



The above graphic illustrates the connections I have made through this project.



Project Outcomes

- The work I have done through this project has allowed me to **bond** with and really **inspire** some wonderful kids. For example, the two girls who attended my reptile evolution activity couldn't stop sharing the amazing facts they had learned.
- This project helped strengthen my community's understanding of the **ecological impact that reptiles, amphibians, and invertebrates have on our environment**. Through our Bioblitzes, for example, NatureYear students found and identified critters like the dusky salamander, shiny woodlouse, common striped woodlouse, slug eggs, fishing spider, and more!
- One of the biggest foci of this project was its **social impact**. My goals were to spread knowledge of exotic animals' impact on the world and to help people overcome fear of these amazing creatures and I believe that I have succeeded in both fields. Just seeing kids who were scared of insects come to the Bioblitz to learn more about them was inspiring.
- This project was really near and dear to my heart. Growing up, my dad always taught me to love and appreciate every animal no matter how scary it seemed. It has been my hope to spread his valuable message to my community and I am grateful to have been able to do so.

Conclusion and Next Steps

- This project has, without a doubt, been a success.
- I helped young students **discover** and **explore** the valuable ecosystem inhabitants that exist within Common Ground.
- I have instilled a sense of appreciation for both native and exotic wildlife in youth who might become future environmental leaders.
- I plan to continue working with my community to inspire love of creepy crawlies!



Acknowledgements and References



This project was very ambitious for me and is one of the most meaningful things I've gotten to do in my life so far, but it would not have been possible without the vast support I received. I would like to thank everyone who helped me in completing this project.

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