research component for students. In particular, these programs should incorporate an entire semester’s worth of transferable credit hours. Although most undergraduate students may not have acquired adequate training to conduct their own research on topics such as declining migratory songbird communities, it should be possible to incorporate students into an established study.

- Creating field ecology courses with the specific goal of having students participate in group projects and publishing their results in peer-reviewed or university journals at the completion of the course. Students may be excited by the intrinsic research component and elect to attend graduate school to continue researching population declines.

- Increasing efforts to teach conservation at the undergraduate level to both majors and nonmajors. The biggest contribution that teaching institutions can make to conservation biology is giving students the knowledge of what loss of species diversity means for ecosystem health and function. Yet many institutions do not offer a course in conservation biology, perhaps because of an emphasis on other sub-disciplines of biology, a lack of qualified faculty, or heavy teaching loads that do not allow additional courses in rotations. When conservation biology classes are offered, they tend to be upper-division courses with prerequisites rather than nonmajor courses at an introductory level.

However, teaching conservation biology issues to nonmajors may be actually be more important than teaching them to biology majors, for two reasons. First, these students are unlikely to be exposed to concepts of conservation biology during their college education. Second, the number of nonmajor students taking biology classes may be considerably larger than the number of majors. The impacts of teaching undergraduate students conservation biology can be impressive. For example, Caro and colleagues (2003) found a significant change in commitment to biodiversity conservation among students after taking a conservation biology course. This solution will not increase research in population declines per se; however, it will improve understanding of species declines among a very large student population.

Moreover, conservation education efforts should be focused on nontraditional groups as well (e.g., community members, college administrators). Although doing so will not educate or train future researchers directly, administrators (e.g., department chairs, deans, presidents) energized by conservation biology may be more receptive to other suggestions and more willing to provide funding or release time for conservation research, particularly on time-sensitive topics. At every institution, faculty must make a concerted effort to communicate with a broader audience about issues in conservation biology, including species declines.

Faculty at teaching institutions have selected this career in large part because of their interest in education and their ability to instill within students an appreciation and understanding of issues in the sciences. However, many of us recognize a need in conservation biology research for greater participation at every level. Our proposed solutions are a means to allow those of us at smaller institutions to make a greater contribution to the field through teaching and research at a critical time in the history of conservation biology.

References cited