

Vernal Pools: Amphibian Breeding Grounds



Vernal pools are temporary wetlands which fill annually from precipitation, snowmelt, and rising groundwater. Most years vernal pools become completely dry and therefore prevent fish populations that would feed on frog eggs and tadpoles from establishing. The inability for fish to establish populations in vernal pools makes them an ideal place for amphibians to breed. Many amphibian species rely solely on vernal pools for breeding grounds and without these pools some species would likely go extinct. Some of the amphibian species that rely on vernal pools for breeding are wood frogs, spring peepers, gray tree frogs, spotted salamanders, blue-spotted salamanders, Jefferson salamanders, and marbled salamanders.

Egg Masses in Vernal Pool



Jared, a 7th grader at Glen Rock Middle School in New Jersey, has been observing a vernal pool at the Glen Rock Arboretum. He took this picture in late February-early March.

Feature Species



Wood frog (*Rana sylvatica*)

The wood frog is widespread throughout northern North America and is the only frog species found north of the Arctic circle. This species can be found in a variety of habitats from woodland forests in the east, grasslands in the west, and tundra in the far north. Wood frogs are a terrestrial species but migrate to vernal pools from late March to early April (depending on location) before the ice has fully melted, to breed. The mating call of the wood frog is similar to a quacking duck. This frog is already being heard in many parts of the country.

Trivia Question: What physiological mechanism do wood frogs possess in order to survive north of the Arctic circle? Stay tuned for the answer in the next FrogWatch USA newsletter.

DON'T FORGET YOUR DATA SHEET!

When making observations for FrogWatch USA, be sure to bring your data sheet with you to the field! The data you enter online at www.frogwatch.org should reflect *only* what you hear while you're in the field.

We want to hear from you!

Please share your FrogWatching experiences with us and your fellow FrogWatch Volunteers! Send your stories and photos to mgaudreau@rwpzoo.org, and you may see yourself in an upcoming FrogWatch newsletter! The newsletter will be published twice a month throughout the FrogWatching season.

News from Around the Country

- Katie and David heard wood frogs on 15 March near Perryville, R.I.
- Claire from the eastern panhandle of W. Va. heard spring peepers on the morning of 17 March.
- Wendy from Houston, Mo., has been hearing spring peepers for a week or two and started hearing American toads on 16 March.
- Alex in Ashville, N.C., is hearing spring peepers.
- Laurie is hearing spring peepers and reports that frog season has started in northwestern Indiana.
- Karen in N.C. heard the American toad on 19 March and is hearing spring peepers, as well.

UPCOMING TRAINING SESSIONS

Learn more about FrogWatch USA or hone your FrogWatching skills at these upcoming training sessions. Contact training facilitators for training session start times.

Chester County Park (Pa.) 4/04/09
jerb@chesco.org

Edmonds Backyard Wildlife Habitat Project (Wash.) 4/07/09
www.reczone.org

Karst Farm Park (Ind.)
Monroe Co. Parks & Recreation 4/8/09
cmeyer@co.monroe.in.us

Edmonds Backyard Wildlife Habitat Project (Wash.) 4/14/09
www.reczone.org

Oglebay's Good Zoo (W. Va.) 4/18/09
PMiller@oglebay-resort.com

Roger Williams Park Zoo (R.I.) 4/18/09
mgaudreau@rwpzoo.org

Mystic Aquarium (Conn.) 4/19/09
MMateleska@mysticaquarium.org

Edmonds Backyard Wildlife Habitat Project (Wash.) 4/21/09
www.reczone.org

Indiana Wildlife Federation (Ind.) 4/26/09
www.indianawildlife.org

Edmonds Backyard Wildlife Habitat Project (Wash.) 4/28/09
www.reczone.org

Send us your FrogWatch training dates and we'll add them to the list!

TADPOLE RESCUE MISSION

"We live on a very wet property with two ponds on either side of our lot line. Recently in Illinois we had a lot of rain and our property flooded to the point that the ponds were connected with water. Over the last few days, the water has been receding. We have hundreds of tadpoles swimming in the water and they are getting caught in the grass as the water goes down. So the neighbor kids and I went out, rescued as many as we could, and put them back in the ponds. We will do that over the next few days as the water goes down and try to rescue as many as we can."

-Lisa from Illinois

Tip 2: Brake for Amphibians

Many amphibian species must travel (migrate) across dangerous, highly trafficked roads to get to their breeding grounds. You can help decrease the road mortality of amphibians by not driving on roads that you know amphibians cross during breeding season and by encouraging your local transportation department to close these heavily used roads temporarily during the season. If you cannot avoid traveling these roads during the amphibian migration season, then be sure to proceed with caution. You may also want to volunteer for organizations that host "Big Night" road crossing events when hundreds, if not thousands, of amphibians are on the move.

To read "Tip 1: Turn Your Backyard into an Amphibian Haven," see the 16 March 2009 newsletter at www.aza.org/frogwatch.

UPDATED TRAINING MATERIALS AVAILABLE

Interested in hosting a training session but don't know how to get started? Or just want some more info about participating in FrogWatch USA? FrogWatch USA has a number of materials to help get you started. Request these materials by contacting Mandy Gaudreau at: mgaudreau@rwpzoo.org.