

North Branch Nature Center

Guidelines for Locating and Assisting at Amphibian Road Crossings

Locating New Crossing Sites:

One of our primary goals is to locate where amphibian road crossings occur, and to help amphibians safely cross the road. Significant road crossings are where 1) there is a high density of individuals and/or a diversity of species crossing, 2) breeding near roads is concentrated, or 3) unusual species are found. The information volunteers collect will help NBNC decide where to concentrate volunteer efforts in the future, and may ultimately help to create roads in the future.

You may choose to locate and assist at several different sites, or stay at one highly used site to assist amphibians cross the road. Please be sure to fill out a separate data sheet for each location that you visit.

Under what weather conditions do “big” or “medium” nights occur?

If the temperature is about 40° F and it's one of the first rainy nights in spring, the amphibians are likely to be on the move. There are often several nights in early spring when weather conditions are just right for movement. You will be notified through a phone tree, and will also receive an email when conditions seem right for attempting a road search.

Where should you go?

You are welcome to go to a predetermined site that will be staffed by a volunteer. Please let us know if this is what you would like to do. We encourage people to also look for new sites. Do a preliminary daytime drive, and use a topo map to locate areas that are likely to be crossings sites. Wetland areas near roads are a good place to start.

What time should you go out?

Go out just after sun down, once the amphibians have had a chance to get moving. Be prepared that while being out and moving the animals is stimulating, it's also tiring work to drive and keep your eyes fixed to the road looking for small amphibians! They will keep moving well into the night, so decide for yourself when it's quitting time.

Can children come along?

Being at a popular crossing site is exciting for all ages. However, dark and rainy conditions are dangerous. Use the utmost caution to ensure that everyone is safe. If children do come along, assign one adult to every child for both the child's safety and the amphibians. One wrong step with a boot is as deadly for a spring peeper as a car. Be sure to always look before making a step.

Please -- for the amphibians' sake -- be sure your hands are squeaky clean, with no lotion, soap or perfume residue.

What should you wear?

- Reflective clothing
- Rain gear
- Mud boots
- Warm, dry layers
- Hat with a brim

What should you bring?

- High powered flashlight with extra batteries
- Clipboard and pencils/pens
- Plastic bag to put over the clipboard
- Clean bucket for carrying amphibians across the road
- Camera
- Spatula for scooping dead ones off the road
- Thermometer
- Snacks & water

Amphibian Road Crossing Protocol

1. **Before you leave home, make sure that your hands are washed and clean. Amphibians breathe through their skin. Lotions, perfumes and soaps leave a residue that is harmful to the animals.**
2. If possible, have at least two people be part of your search. It will be more fun and more effective. One person can drive while the other keeps their eye fixed to the road scanning for frogs and salamanders. Once at a crossing site, you can also divvy up data-keeping and amphibian-shuttling tasks.
3. Drive slowly - - about 15 mph - - to look for sites. Do not try and do major survey work on extremely busy roads. It is too dangerous. Choose to survey roads where you can be safe. Drive slower if necessary when amphibians are really dense.
4. Keep your windows open at all times as you drive. The “quack” of wood frogs might be the first indicator you have that you’re near a breeding pool.
5. Scan the whole road for frogs and salamanders. You’ll see frogs and toads jumping, or sitting still looking like tipped up pyramids in the road. Salamanders look like sticks with one end tipped up. They are often blinded by the headlights, and will not move until you come to them.
6. Once you locate a good crossing spot, pull onto the side of the road. *Always stop where your car is easily visible from behind and pull over to the side as much as possible to avoid the chance of getting rear-ended. It’s also good not to stop directly in front of a house – you’ll worry the homeowners if you do.* If you can, park away from the heavily used area and walk into the site. This will help you avoid driving onto the road bank and inadvertently squashing amphibians. **Be sure to check under your car for amphibians before you leave.**
7. Fill out the information on the front side of the data sheet. Be sure to include starting time, temperature, and weather information. Take at least two minutes to let the thermometer adjust to the air temperature. Be sure to record changes in the weather.
8. Move live animals in the direction they were headed. Take note of the cardinal direction they were moving and indicate this on your data sheet. Move them completely off the road, as far off to the side as you can get. Set them carefully into the leaf litter. Be careful not to step onto other amphibians that may be hidden in the leaf litter. Be sure to count every individual of every species that you see. If you have more than one volunteer, have people shout out how many they have moved and have another keep the data sheet. Use tick marks to record how many live or dead you have seen. Stay out of the woods and fields where amphibians are difficult to see.
9. Using a spatula, move the dead amphibians off the road, so as to avoid them being counted twice. Be sure to record these in the separate “dead” column.
10. Take photos of as many species as you can at each location. One for each species is enough. Attached please find tips on taking useful pictures. If you visit more than one site, be sure to indicate on the photo which site the picture was taken at.

11. Photocopy or draw a map and clearly indicate the road crossing. Write your name and the date on the map.

Make a copy of your the data sheet(s) for your own records. *Send the data sheets, along with maps and any photos to Larry Clarfeld at North Branch Nature Center, 713 Elm Street, Montpelier, Vermont 05602.* If you have any questions, please feel free to call 229-6206 or email larry@northbranchnaturecenter.org.