

March 2017

Conservation Connection:
Amphibian Migration – Coming to a Road Near You!

By Michele Grzenda, Weston Conservation Administrator

Even though it's technically still winter, warmer days and increased daylight are upon us! With that brings my favorite event: Big Night! "Big Night" is often used to describe the annual ritual of certain frogs and salamanders when they migrate from their upland overwintering habitat towards their spring breeding ground. During Big Night, you have a chance of seeing spotted salamanders, wood frogs, spring peepers, and other amphibians heading towards a vernal pool (generally a small pond or wetland which dries up in the summer months and does not support fish populations).



When will Big Night occur? It is always hard to predict as it generally happens on the first few raining nights in March and early April when the night temperature is above 40 degrees. However, with this year's mild winter, I have already heard spring peepers "peeping" at Burchard Park. Most years, Weston does not have one "Big Night", but rather lots of smaller movements ("Many Little Nights" doesn't sound as exciting as "Big Night").

Big Night is bitter-sweet to many naturalists. It's fun to see the amphibians on the move. However, in a landscape bisected by a network of roads, it often means that these small creatures risk their own life crossing pavement each year. The best we can hope for is that Big Night happens late at night, when most cars are off the roads.

What you can do

Consider visiting a roadway on a rainy night looking for migrating salamanders. For your own safety, be sure to visit one with a sidewalk. There are some precautions you should take:

- Wear reflective vests or clothing if possible
- Have multiple flashlights
- Keep young children next to you
- Assume vehicles do not see you and stay off the road when they approach
- Wear warm, weather resistant clothing and shoes

Amphibians do not like to be handled so in most cases simply observe them. If vehicle headlights are in the distance and there is a frog or salamander in the road please do move it off the road in the direction it is heading. Moisten hands if possible in a puddle before handling to minimize disturbance to their skin. You are likely to see (yellow) spotted salamanders (which can be 8" long), wood frogs, spring peepers, and American toads. And there is always a

March 2017



possibility of a rarer sighting, such as a blue-spotted salamander. If one of these animals is seen, please call the Weston Conservation Office at 781-786-5068. Once you experience first-hand the activity on these special nights you will certainly understand the concern we have for these small creatures. On all rainy nights in spring and summer there is considerable amphibian activity on the roadways so please keep that in mind as you are out on any roadway. Be safe but try to give them a chance at survival.

Michele Grzenda will be presenting a slide show about Vernal Pools at Sudbury Valley Trustees in Sudbury on March 14th at 7p.m. For more information and to register, please visit <http://www.svtweb.org/programs/calendar>