



Winter/Spring 2003

A NEWSLETTER

from the

CAPE ANN VERNAL POND TEAM

THE CAVPT IS A HOPELESSLY NON-PROFIT VOLUNTEER ORGANIZATION DEDICATED TO VERNAL POND CONSERVATION AND EDUCATION SINCE 1990.

EDUCATIONAL OUTREACH

Ponds in the Classroom

by Jessica Kagle

"Excuse me, can you help me find something to eat?" a fifth grade student asked me. She was holding a large photograph of a salamander larva. I led her through a knot of children, posters, and string, searching until we found a boy with a fairy shrimp poster. Flipping over her picture, the girl found a list of potential foods for salamander larvae, including fairy shrimp. I handed the students a piece of green yarn and they tied their posters together. So goes the vernal pond food web game, where students pretending to be ravenous creatures whirl around their classrooms looking for classmates playing the roles of their potential food items. When consumer and food find each other, they tie posters depicting their animals together with yarn, and then tangle themselves up even more as they look for additional food sources.

This game is just one of the activities conducted as part of *Ponds in the Classroom*, CAVPT's new formal outreach project. Nathan Mineo and I initiated this project during the spring of 2002. I had just joined the team that winter, and thought an interactive program including live animals, creative games, and a field trip would be a good way to get kids excited about protecting vernal ponds. With only three months left in the school year, Nate and I developed a flexible curriculum and distributed a flyer offering vernal pond ecology workshops to all third through eighth grade teachers on Cape Ann. Less than a week after the flyers left my hands, I began getting calls from teachers who were interested in working with us. In 2002, we scheduled a total of seven workshops for fourth and fifth grade classes in Gloucester. At one of the schools

visited, a teacher we hadn't talked with beforehand peeked in on the workshop and was so intrigued that she convinced us to give a brief presentation to her students later that week. A *Ponds in the Classroom* workshop begins as Nathan and I attempt to pass unnoticed through the halls of an elementary school laden with coolers, fishbowls, aquarium tanks, and numerous plastic containers from which peeps, trills, and croaks are emanating. If you have ever tried stealthily bringing animals through an elementary school corridor, you probably know that despite your best efforts you are likely to be surrounded by a mob of children begging you to open the boxes and show them the animals. I admit to occasionally caving in and taking out a bullfrog in the middle of the hallway to show a passing second grader who insists it isn't fair that we aren't coming to his room. Once inside a classroom, we do our best to transform it into a vernal pond. Our tricks

for doing this include displaying live animals borrowed from local ponds (and a few from Rick), screening CAVPT's Vernal Ponds video, and playing games that encourage kids to think about the daily survival challenges of living in a temporary pond. When we have all the kids thoroughly convinced that they are frogs, salamanders, leeches, and dragonfly nymphs, we take them outside for the field trip portion of our workshop. Last year, we walked to a pond right behind the Fuller School for our field trips.



photo by N. Mineo "Ponds in the Classroom" field trip.

After watching the video and getting a close look at the animals we brought in, kids knew what creatures could be hiding in the pond, and were pretty excited about mucking around looking for them. In fact, I'm pretty sure Nate said he once had to grab a kid's foot to keep him from diving into the water. Even when they didn't find any amphibians, the

Summer Ponds

by Rick Roth

We look forward to the March and April nighttime field trips when we stand in mist, drizzle, and rain to see (and hear) breeding frogs and salamanders. There are aquatic insects, fairy shrimp, and other critters, too. Spring is amazing but vernal pond habitats are active in all seasons. One of my favorites times is when the frogs emerge from the pools. They have metamorphosed from tadpoles, grown legs, developed lungs, absorbed their tails, and hopped onto dry land for the first time.

A few years ago, on a summer afternoon, I was walking a path in the woods near a cluster of vernal ponds. Every foot fall sent several froglets (so tiny they could sit on a dime

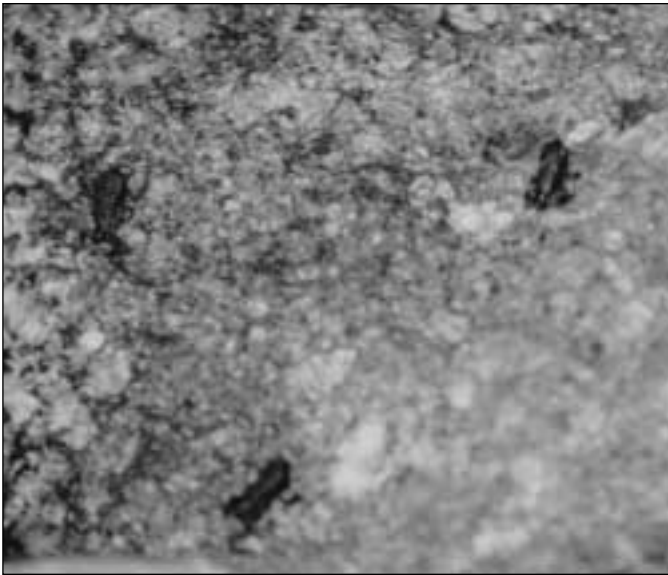


photo by N. Mineo Emergent toads. (these are really actual size)

without spilling over the sides) leaping out of my way. I lay on my stomach for a closer look and found three species on this day; wood frogs, spring peepers, and American toads. After watching for a while I realized you could tell them apart by the way they jumped. Toads moved in frantic, short hops of only a few body lengths. Blit, blit, blit. Wood frogs, (looking just like their parents in miniature, right down to the lone ranger mask on their face) seem to cover thirty times their length in one rainbow-shaped bound. Peepers jump too, and they have those sticky tree frog feet. Appearing to defy the laws of physics, they can spring forward more than a foot, attach themselves to the nearest granite boulder or tree trunk, and within a split-second they are just stuck there, motionless. Nature's refrigerator magnets, and if you blink you miss the whole thing. It led me to wonder how they can jump that far, that fast, and land on something as hard as rock without bursting their delicate little skins or breaking tiny bones. Frogs are cool. If you walk the woods in summer you may be fortunate enough to see this amphibian parade. Move carefully, the toads in particular can be a little slow to get out of your way.

Things We Did Last Spring / Summer...

Vernal Pools for Educators Workshop - March 20, 2002
Held at the Doyon School in Ipswich, presented by the Natural Heritage & Endangered Species Program and the Vernal Pool Association with Leo Kenney, Matt Burne & Mike Harney. Jessica, Rick & Nick attended this informative day long event.

Sawyer Free Children's Library - April 13, 2002 Rick, Cora & Jessica presented a Saturday afternoon program for a packed house of kids (and some parents, too) in the Friends Room. We showed our video as an introduction to vernal ponds. As always the stars were the salamanders, frogs, snakes and bugs we brought with us. *Thanks to Cathy Talty and the library staff for being so nice to us.*

North Shore Earth Fest at Lynn Woods - April 20, 2002
The CAVPT was happy to be invited to participate in Earth Fest 2002 at Lynn Woods. Over 1000 people attended the celebration. Our creature exhibit generated an enormous response and we were able to sell a few videos and guide books as well as increase our mailing list. *Thanks to Don Glazier including us in this event.*

Earth Day at Beverly Common (sponsored by the Beverly Conservation Land Trust) - April 20, 2002
It was a cold and rainy day, but that didn't stop a large group of enthusiastic stalwarts from visiting our display. *Thank you to Stella Mae Seamans and Joan Johnson.*

Bradley Palmer National Trail Day - June 1, 2002
Many visitors, mostly kids, passed through the Nature Center to check out critters, gather info and view our video. There were numerous organizations promoting Massachusetts Parks & Trails. *We would like to thank Peter Carlson, the park supervisor for including us in this event.*

Annual CAVPT Yard Sale - July 20, 2002

Unprecedented attendance by team members made for quick set-up and clean-up. We had lots of fun and made money for our conservation efforts.



photo by R. Roth

Ileen got caught playing with the equipment during the yard sale. (actual size)

GRANTS & DONATIONS

Thank you to all the generous individuals who donated to our team in the past year, and...

Thank you to all the grant makers who funded Cape Ann Vernal Pond Team projects

Gloucester School Connection
Gloucester Cultural Council
Manchester-Essex Conservation Trust
Toad Hall Bookstore
EnTrust Fund

Please help us in our efforts to preserve wildlife habitat through vernal pond conservation by sending a donation to:

THE CAPE ANN VERNAL POND TEAM
PO Box 12
Rockport, MA 01966

FIELD TRIPS

Rainy Nights & Flashlights

Every spring CAVPT members lead nighttime field trips to the ponds to see the amphibian breeding activity. Check your flashlights, get new batteries and put your rain gear on the hook by the door.

To avoid habitat destruction and critter disturbance we limit the number of participants on each trip.

CALENDAR of Upcoming Stuff...

Saturday, April 5, 10:30 AM
Manchester by the Sea Public Library

Sunday, April 27, 12:00 - 3:00 PM
Earth Day at Beverly Commons

Look for more events coming soon.

For the most current listing of upcoming events check out our website at
www.capeannvernalpond.com

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kids always trooped back to the classroom proudly describing all the larval insects they had observed. To me, the most important feature of any environmental education activity is that it generates creative thought from each individual. That means that games will have substantially different outcomes each time they are played. It is also crucial to give students an opportunity to ponder questions that arise during a short presentation. Kids in our workshops often ask thoughtful questions about the puzzling lives of aquatic animals whose homes dry up periodically. How is it that fairy shrimp persist if they can't leave the pond, how do animals find a new pond, does it have to dry up to be a vernal pond? These deserve more consideration than we can provide in a short workshop. Last year, for some of our classes, we designed individualized follow-up booklets for each class, recounting the student's best questions and providing resources for more information. In the future we hope to provide opportunities for school groups to build a relationship with the Cape Ann Vernal Pond Team and even conduct projects in partnership with the team.

This year, we will reach many more students and will present newly designed activities. In October, we distributed a new color flyer designed by Cora and have already scheduled workshops for twenty-one school classes and a scout troop. To enhance the



photo by N. Mineo

Our bullfrog peers at a curious young human.

learning potential of the workshops, we have given each class the option of having a classroom day followed by a field trip a few days later. We have received funding for our work from the Gloucester School Connection, Gloucester Cultural Council, Manchester Essex Conservation Trust, and Toad Hall Bookstore, and are still waiting to hear from additional funders. *Ponds in the Classroom* has grown over the past year, and hopefully it will become a permanent component of CAVPT's work.

If you are a teacher or youth group leader on Cape Ann, and you are interested in scheduling a *Ponds in the Classroom* workshop call Jessica Kagle at 617 290-2258.



Return Service Requested

Cape Ann Vernal Pond Team
 P.O.Box 12
 Rockport, MA 01966

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 Rockport, MA



photo by N. Mineo

Green frog - *Rana clamitans melanota* (2-4")

Green frogs utilize fresh water wetlands including vernal ponds. Adults are variable in color but they always have a pair of dorsolateral ridges extending from the tympanum (ear) along the back. This helps to distinguish them from bullfrogs, that lack these ridges and have a smooth back.

THANK YOU

- Bill Elwell and Associates**
- The Trustees of Reservations**
- Rockport Public School System** - for letting us have the yard sale on their property
- Toad Hall Book Store** - they continue to show our video at the store and sell our stuff
- Matt Burne and Leo Kenney** - for the big maps
- Halibut Point State Park** - display space and continued support of our programs
- Greg Smith of SavingCapeAnn.com** - for airing our video on channel 12
- The New England Herpetological Society** - for their continued support
- Sawyer Free Public Library**
- Matt Gardner**
- Tony & Margo Ashdon** - for hosting our winter meeting at their house
- Kathy and Andy Heinze** - for hosting our summer team meeting at the palace
- Greg Mertz & Katrina Banagis** of The New England Wildlife Center
- Carol Gray & the Sawyer Free Public Library**

And to everyone who donated their time and effort.