



Heath with peeper at BEEC's Guilford Street crossing site.
Kristina Weeks



The spring migration is underway in Allegany County, New York (USA)
Dave Huth

SECOND NATURE

THE MAGIC OF SPRING'S AMPHIBIAN MIGRATION

A Nighttime Adventure for Families

By Bonnyvale Environmental Education Center

As the last of winter's chill melts away and the first warm(ish) rains of spring begin to fall, something extraordinary happens in the forests and wetlands of our region. Under the cover of darkness, an ancient and unseen migration takes place — one that brings thousands of travelers out of their woodland hideaways and into the pools where life begins anew.

This is the annual amphibian migration, a seasonal spectacle that offers families a chance to witness nature's magic up close. Spotted salamanders, wood frogs, and spring peepers emerge from their winter refuges and make their way to vernal pools — temporary woodland ponds that fill with snow melt and rain but disappear by summer's end. These pools, free from fish that would prey on eggs and tadpoles, provide the perfect nursery for amphibian young.

Spotted Salamanders are the stars of the show. They are members of the mole

salamander group — large salamanders that spend most of their lives in underground tunnels. It is only on these spring migration nights that we have a chance to see them, setting forth in their yellow polka-dot suits, for their one social engagement of the year.

A Special Kind of Rainy Night

The best time to see this phenomenon is on a warm, rainy evening in early spring when temperatures hover around 40 degrees or higher. On these nights, country roads and forest paths come alive with movement as salamanders and frogs make their way toward their breeding pools. If you're lucky enough to be outside, you might hear the first quacks of wood frogs or the high-pitched chorus of spring peepers echoing through the trees — nature's first true songs of spring.

A Lesson in Conservation

Sadly, many amphibians face threats from habitat destruction and road traffic. The spring migration offers a rare chance to help them since we can predict when

and where many of them will be crossing roads. The Bonnyvale Environmental Education Center (BEEC) in Brattleboro organizes Salamander Crossing Brigades in southeastern Vermont, and the Harris Center for Conservation Education organizes brigades in southwestern New Hampshire. These organizations have maps of sites where amphibians are known to cross roads and keep their lists of trained crossing guards apprised throughout the crossing season so they will know when amphibian activity is likely. Both organizations have lists of family-friendly sites — quiet roads with slow-moving traffic.

Amphibian migration night is a perfect outing for parents who want to introduce their children to the wonders of the natural world. Training is important! For your safety and the safety of the amphibians, both organizations will offer virtual training sessions this spring. BEEC's training will take place on Thursday, March 27 at 6:30 p.m. Learn more and register at beec.org. The Harris Center's training will be on Thursday, March 13 at 7 p.m. Learn

more and register at harriscenter.org. If you can't attend a virtual training, recordings will be available on the websites for each center.

Amphibian migrations occur after dark, with most of the activity ramping up around 9 p.m. Sign up for amphibian migration forecasts and choose a night when the kids can stay up late. They won't forget the quiet mystery of the forest after dark and the magic of helping these marvelous creatures on their treacherous journeys — it's a rare chance for kids to be heroes.

An Unforgettable Spring Tradition

The amphibian migration is fleeting, lasting only a few weeks each spring, but the memories made on these misty, rain-drenched nights will stay with your children forever. As you step into the woods and hear the first peeping calls of spring, you'll know you're witnessing something ancient, magical, and deeply connected to the rhythms of the natural world.

So, this spring, grab your rain boots, bundle up, and venture out into the night. You just might find yourself in the middle of one of nature's most enchanting events.

Second Nature is submitted by the naturalists at Bonnyvale Environmental Education Center in West Brattleboro. BEEC is a member-supported, nonprofit organization. Come walk on the trails, open to the public from sunrise to sunset. Nature Explorers Spring Camp is April 14-18 from 9 a.m., to 3 p.m., for grades K-4. Find out about the Nature Play Group for 3-5-year-olds, Hike-and-Seek family outings, and more at beec.org.