



SPRING/SUMMER 2002

# 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.

### MEMBERS

Rick Roth, Director  
 Margo Ashdon  
 Tony Ashdon  
 Jane Beauvais  
 Barbara Buls  
 Alex Eisenzopf  
 John Eisenzopf  
 Margaret Flowers  
 Ileen Graham  
 Cora Hawks  
 Kathy Heinze  
 Jessica Kagle  
 Cathy Kelley  
 Ruth Kuykendall  
 H.A. Lind  
 Nathan Mineo  
 Maire Murphy  
 Elizabeth Rehill  
 Curtis Sarkin  
 Nick Taormina  
 Peter Willett  
 Chris Wood

### WHERE LIFE BREEDS LIFE

by Nathan Mineo

When we arrived in the faintly moonlit night, winter's bite could still be felt but her silence was now nonexistent. Even before I turned off my car's engine, the shrill peeps of mating spring peepers found their way to my ears. The sounds grew more intense as I stepped into the night and made my way to the pond. I could actually feel the chorus of shrill peeps and low wood frog quacks (which sound like ducks) reverberating through my body. When I arrived at the water's edge with one of the big spotlights, I was amazed by the amount of activity in the pond. In the dark water, now illuminated by Rick's ridiculously bright spotlight that I wielded, spotted salamanders were preparing themselves for the mating season. Most, if not all, were probably males because the males usually arrive at the ponds earlier in the season than the females. Aside from an occasional quick swim to the surface for a breath of air, the spotted salamanders remained at the bottom of the pond on the decaying leaf-litter which fuels the entire ecosystem and allows life to thrive. Among the salamanders were thousands of white specks about the size of the cotton end of a Q-tip. These specks are *spermatophors*—tiny gelatinous globs, which support sperm at their tops. An individual female will use the sperm from several of these *spermatophors* to fertilize her eggs.

The sights and sounds overwhelmed my senses. I still couldn't get over the amount of life, activity and sound emanating from an area about the size of my living room. As I walked along the water's edge peering into the shallows of the pond, I had to keep one eye on the ground in front of me to avoid crushing any spring peepers. Their tiny size (about the size of a dime) and inconspicuous color make them nearly invisible to predators. There must have been thousands of these little frogs in and around the pond. Their favored peeping spots include objects sticking out of the water such as rocks, sticks and logs, the shallow water around the edges of the pond and a small grassy area that juts a few feet into the pond. I had never before seen a spring peeper, so seeing that many for the first time in my life was disorienting. I was mesmerized by the throat ballooning

out with every peep. What's really amazing about these tiny spring peepers is that such a huge sound can come from such a small creature. The spring peepers breeding call can be heard from up to half a mile away; and there I was only a few feet away getting blasted by the full force of their peep.

The wood frogs were perhaps the most comical creatures in the mating amalgam. Most of them hung out near the peepers' grass peninsula as well as in other shallows where they would just float and quack. I watched random individuals for short periods of time and all they did was float and quack. Sometimes, if disturbed, they would clumsily swim away while bumping into each other, with their hind legs moving one then the other in a continuous kicking motion. Some dove to the bottom where they would just sit still among the leaf-litter thinking I couldn't see them. All this noise made by the peepers and wood frogs is most likely designed to entice females to their breeding ground, i.e. the pond. The salamanders have no need for such erotic vocals probably because they almost always return to the pond from which they first emerged. This means that females, as well as males, are bound to arrive at the pond.

This intricate, diverse and fragile ecosystem is but one of thousands, even millions on the Earth. When compared to such a grand model, this one pond may seem insignificant and maybe even worthless. Each individual creature becomes less and less significant as we add up the numbers from pond to pond across the globe. But is it really insignificant just because it is so small compared to the huge Earth on which it sits? Absolutely not! This one pond contributes to a larger ecosystem, which in turn contributes to an even larger ecosystem and so on and so forth right up to the ecosystem which governs the entire Earth itself. This one vernal pond is not insignificant because it is so small compared to something so big such as the ecosystem of the Earth, but rather, it is all the more significant because it is connected to this immense ecosystem. Vernal ponds create life and perpetuate life all the way up to a global level, even indirectly supporting human life. The preservation of a vernal pond is a small but significant step toward saving the Earth and its inhabitants.



A Spotted Salamander races to its breeding pool.

Check out our website at:

[www.capeannvernalpond.com](http://www.capeannvernalpond.com)

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## WHAT WE'VE BEEN DOING.....

### Ipswich River Wildlife Sanctuary April 14, 2001

Bob Speare led a field trip to some of the pools in and around the sanctuary as a follow-up to the certification workshop he presented in October 2000. We had a great day learning about species identification at the ponds. Thanks Bob.

### Rockport DAR April 10, 2001

The Rockport Chapter of The Daughters of the American Revolution were kind enough to invite Rick to speak at their April meeting. We had a nice lunch before the presentation and I made some new friends. After viewing our video, the discussion and questions that followed left me quite sure that the DAR membership were very aware of wetlands and conservation issues.

*Thank you to Marguerite Curry for the invitation and to the DAR for a donation to CAVPT.*

### Manchester/Essex Conservation Trust April 8, 2001

At the Manchester Community House (that's the building by the train station), Cora and Rick brought the whole graphics display to this Sunday afternoon exhibit and ran video on our little TV. Trust members and visitors enjoyed the critters, especially the fairy shrimp (vernal pool obligate species). Very few people have seen these fascinating little creatures in the wild (or anywhere).

*Thanks to Martha Hoar for the invitation and to the Trust for the generous donation.*



*Children examine critters at Sawyer Free Library.*

### Sawyer Free Children's Library April 2001

Cora, Margo F. and Rick 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 Carol Gray, Kathy Talty and Christine Rosso for being so nice to us. Photo by Linda Bosselman.*

### Earth Day at Halibut Point State Park April 21, 2001

Nick, Peter, Tony, Margo A., Margo F., Cora, Barb, Ileen, Rick. We had the whole upstairs at the Visitor's Center to ourselves for this all-day event. Team members agreed that it was one of our best displays ever of graphics, video and critters. Thank you to John Nove at the Park for having us there and to Greg Smith who videotaped some of our animals in action for the local cable TV station (channel 12).

### Earth Fest at Lynn Woods Reservation 2001

The CAVPT was happy to be invited to participate in Earth Fest 2001 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. Our contribution was so well received the CAVPT has been invited to Earth Fest 2002. Come see us!

### Pigeon Hill Site Visit Spring 2001

Rick was able to join in a site visit to a proposed development on Pigeon Hill Street in Rockport. Among others, this trip was attended by Rockport Conservation Administrator Julie McMahon, and Pat Huckery and Matt Burne from the Natural Heritage and Endangered Species Program, MA Division of Fisheries and Wildlife.

We visited about a dozen motions (motions are small quarries that often evolve into vernal pools). It was interesting to see how the real Natural Heritage biologists do their field work; counting egg masses, frog numbers and species, and netting insects and other aquatics. Most of the motions are now certified vernal pools and nearby Estimated Habitat for Spotted Turtles was expanded into the proposed development site as a result of this site visit.

### Massachusetts Association of Science Teachers Annual Convention November 9, 2001

Thanks to MAST past-president Joann Blum, a flyer about our video was included in the 1200 invitations to the convention. We set up a table in the non-profits exhibit area where Barb distributed information and some CAVPT products including videos and posters...

Rick attended a workshop by Leo Kenney, the man who founded the Vernal Pool Association and wrote the book on vernal pool education. His group is coordinating a poster project for school kids, by school kids. Fantastic artwork and educational experience for students. Maybe a school on Cape Ann can do one of these. Great awareness for the school and the community. Alex and Rick gave a well-received video presentation. Teachers were very enthusiastic and helpful with ideas for a teacher's guide to the video which we hope to create soon. *Thanks to Cheryl B. for designing the flyer, to Louise Palanzi for being so helpful when we were making the arrangements to attend and present at this convention and to Toad Hall Bookstore for funding the flyer and travel expenses.*

### Yard Sales

CAVPT held two very successful yard sales in 2001, on May 26, and August 11, organized by our experts on the subject, Cora Hawks and Kathy Heinze. Almost all team members got involved in one way or another. Tony and Margo stored the donated items until the big days (there was a lot of stuff). And we made almost \$2000 total (a large portion of our annual budget).

*Our thanks to everyone, especially Kathy and Cora for making it happen. To Mac Bell for allowing us to use the lot next to the big brick parking lot (you know, where the Fiesta is). Terrific location! To Alicia Padre for bringing us all coffee and goodies when we really needed them. To everyone who donated items for sale. And most especially to everyone who came by to support us!*



*At the yard sale - Cora and Kathy just stand there.*



## We take care with our live animals.

We display live animals because we find most people who visit our exhibits are seeing many of these species for the first time. The animals themselves generate interest and excitement, and are extremely important tools for educating about vernal pools and wildlife habitat conservation.

Wood frogs and spotted salamanders are collected after their breeding activity is complete, so the disturbance to their existence is minimized. Spring peepers are usually kept for only one presentation, then exchanged for different individuals. Fairy shrimp are collected the night before a program, and released immediately afterward.

Our major exhibit season is confined to the months of March and April. Our first priority when collecting, transporting, caging or exhibiting is the welfare of each animal. Capture sites are noted and all animals are released back to their capture site.

Rick has a Scientific Collecting Permit issued by the Massachusetts Division of Fisheries and Wildlife which allows him to collect animals such as spotted salamanders and various snake species. The permit is required because some of the animals are rare or delicate and require special handling to ensure they are returned to the wild unharmed and without interruption to their breeding cycles.

### NEW MEMBERS:

Newest vernal ponder...Caleb Constantine Willett, born August 2001 to team member Peter Willett and his lovely bride Leah. Congratulations.

New (larger) members: Jessica Kagle (NOT Kagel), Jane Beauvais, John Eisenzopf.



*Spotted Turtle at full speed.*

#### CAPE ANN VERNAL POND TEAM STORE

Sales of our stuff helps support the team so please check out the flyer in this newsletter or check the "store" page on our website. Thanks.  
[www.capeannvernalpond.com](http://www.capeannvernalpond.com)

## CALENDAR of Upcoming Stuff...

### New Display at Halibut Point

Our new display at Halibut Point State Reservation in Rockport has joined the other exhibits at the visitor center. The display features colorful photographs of vernal pond life, as well as images from some of our field trips. The close-ups of spotted salamanders, breeding spring peepers, and egg masses give visitors an idea of what they might find in a vernal pond. Photos of observers huddled under a flock of umbrellas give them an idea of what to expect if they are brave enough to join a CAVPT field trip! The other Halibut Point exhibits highlight the wildlife of marine and woodland habitats, and the cultural history of granite quarries. As the visitor center is open year round and receives many visitors, we hope our display will help to spread understanding of vernal ponds as rich and important wildlife habitat. The vernal pond display is located in the room at the base of the fire tower inside the visitor center.

### Field Trips

Every spring CAVPT members lead night time field trips to the ponds to see the amphibian breeding activity. This is the best way to witness the exciting life-cycle of vernal pools. If you would like to come, give us an evening phone number and keep boots and a raincoat handy by the door. (Since we don't tell the critters when to breed, there can only be about two hours notice.) We limit the number of participants to avoid habitat destruction and critter disturbance.

### Earth Fest at Lynn Woods - Saturday April 20, 9:00 am - 2:00 pm

We have been invited back to participate in Earth Fest 2002 at Lynn Woods. Over 1000 people attended last year's celebration and our creature exhibit generated an enormous response. Come see us!

### Gloucester Pride Stride - Sunday April 28

This is probably Gloucester's largest community fund-raising event. We will have a display and we encourage supporters to raise pledges for the team. Hope to see you there!

### Educators Workshops

Workshops are open to educators teaching biological, life science, or environmental topics in Massachusetts. Seven dates and locations throughout the state between March 20 and May 9. Space is limited, so apply immediately. Attendees earn Professional Development Points. For more info visit [www.vernalpool.org](http://www.vernalpool.org), or contact:

Nancy Eddy

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### YARD SALE!!!

Watch for our yard sale fundraiser in the fall. Date, location and time TBD, but it will be posted in the Gloucester Times, advertised on Channel 12, and on our website.

If you have stuff you can donate to the yard sale, we will pick up and store it free! Call Rick Roth at 978-281-3480 to arrange a pick up.

### Can your company donate raffle items?

Your generosity will be gratefully acknowledged in our newsletter, on our website, at our presentations and to our friends.

## Grants and Donations, 2001:

The EnTrust Fund - \$2000.00

New England Herpetological Society - \$350.00

Toad Hall Bookstore - \$189.00 for advertising and travel expenses for the MAST Convention.

Anonymous donation - \$2000.00 Wow!

And Many Others who give their resources and time generously!  
Thank You!

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logo poster by H.A. Lind

## THANK YOU

Greg Smith for airing our video again this year on channel 12.  
Dick Knowles at Halibut Point State Park in Rockport for letting us have a display there.  
Dennis Pyburn for displaying our poster at Ravenswood Park.  
Joann Blum and Louise Palanzi from The Massachusetts Association of Science Teachers.  
Bob Speare for a terrific field trip.  
Toad Hall Bookstore - they continue to show our video at the store and sell our stuff.  
The New England Herpetological Society for their continuing support.  
Matt Burne and Leo Kenney for the big map.  
Charlie Costello for the aerial photos.  
Katie Busse for the other big map.  
Stephanie G. for the computer help  
Mac Bell for letting us have yard sales on his property.

## PLANT PROJECT UNDERWAY. CAN YOU HELP?

Members Rick, Margo and Nathan of the CAVPT are currently photographing and cataloging the wetland plants most commonly found in vernal ponds on Cape Ann. All photographs are being taken in Cape Ann Vernal Ponds. Our goal is to create attractive educational posters to use as teaching aids and perhaps to sell. Complete sets of these posters will be made available to schools and other educators when they are completed. We are hoping to find volunteers to help shoot local plants or provide their photos for use in this project. Please contact us if you can be of help.

*A special thanks to Cheryl Briscoe for her help designing and printing a working prototype.*