

Despite the Weather, Salamander Surveyors Completed their Task

The weather in early April was wet and cold, but our volunteer families got the job done. They put out the traps, then checked them every day for 6 days straight. It was cold and rainy; the water was deep; and some of them had to go out in the dark. The conditions were not ideal for finding any salamanders in their traps, but they were thrilled with whatever they did encounter.

This was a statewide survey funded with a grant from the Wisconsin Citizen-based Monitoring Network to Wisconsin Audubon Council, Inc., a coalition of the state's 17 Audubon chapters and centers. Experts with the WDNR and state universities are guiding this effort.

Monitors will also place traps at the same sites for 6 consecutive days between July 1-15 in order to detect larval salamanders and all life stages of central newts.

Our volunteers are: Tom & Mary Willadsen and son, David; Veronica Hansen and son, Zach; Terry & Cheryl Broullire and children, Ella and Nathan; Katherine Kasten and son, Freddy.

Ella Broullire (age 10) wrote: *The salamander survey was a great experience. Every day we would look forward to going. We were always hoping to find a salamander or to see interesting things in the traps. Every day was exciting and we always wanted it to last. We mostly found chorus frogs and water beetles and only a few wood frogs. Some days we found chorus frogs mating in the traps. That was fascinating. We never found any eggs. One evening when our Dad stayed silent at one trap we knew something was up. Since the traps were under water we thought something had died. It had rained a lot the night before so we were frightened. When Dad announced it was a salamander, we raced over, not caring if we got wet. That was the end of staying dry. At first Dad thought it was dead, but it wasn't. It was a blue-spotted salamander. That was our lucky day. But each day was an adventure. Dad wore bags on his legs (in his knee high boots), hoping to keep dry. We wore boots and almost never stayed dry. Only twice did we wear bags. We walked back to the car with soaked pants and the water was freezing. We had to dump water from our boots. The week was very rainy and it was strange seeing the water rise. The weather was mostly dreary and wet. There were only a couple good days. One night it was very dark and we had to use flashlights. It was actually kind of scary. At the pond we heard frogs singing and we didn't feel as lonely. Even though we had to go every day, we never got bored. In the beginning when we checked out the pond, we found garter snakes. It was a very fun week looking for salamanders!*

Veronica Hansen and her son Zach said: *This really is a great project for the reptile/amphibian enthusiast, but it is not designed for someone who likes to be squeaky clean at all times. Our biggest challenge was learning the best way to maneuver the traps in and out of the water with a minimum of wet feet! We found using a long stick to position the traps in the right depth of water as well as for pulling them out worked really well. Thank goodness we tied the traps to branches and such! With the amount of rain and/or snow we had, some days we would not have found them without the attached ropes. In contrast, some days the water would recede a bit and then the traps didn't have as much water in them as we would have liked.*

Although we were disappointed to not catch any salamanders, we felt quite honored to catch 3 wood frogs on separate days. We enjoyed observing them with their unique coloration. We also caught baby fish, leeches and huge bugs. Everything we did catch was alive in the traps and we were able to release them back into their home.

David Willadsen (far left) stands on the board walk at Sullivan's Woods near the pond. Ella and Nathan Broullire (left) hold the blue-spotted salamander found in one of their traps.

