



Folks in Nottingham helped including Kristen's daughter help the amphibians across the roads

How Nottingham Helped the Amphibians Across the Roads

Kristen Lamb and Steve Soreff, MD

Each year, in early spring, late March into early May, a special event unfolds over several nights. The conditions must be right: about 50 degrees and rainy, after the ground has thawed. And then, when the time is right, thousands of tiny animals emerge from the ground. Some are spotted with bright yellow polka dots. Some have suction cup toes. And some can camouflage into the stone, pavement, or leaves that they rest on as their body shakes off the last of the frost. What is this event? It's called *Big Night*, and it is the mass movement of our local amphibian species from their winter hibernation grounds to their breeding grounds.

Our local frogs, salamanders, and newts have been doing this spring ritual for millions of years. And yet, now cars and roads stand in their way. "But what do these species have to do with us?" the modern human mind may ask. Beyond being living beings with a similar heart, organs, and biology as ourselves, these species play an important role in managing insect populations that could pose issues for human health, forestry, and agriculture. These insects, if left unchecked, are very destructive. Also, these amphibians are also prey for many of our upland species such as barred owls and red-shouldered hawks.

With the demands of work, errands, and modern society, thousands of these animals are killed each season as they make their ancestral trek across roads. And a Nottingham resident, Dallas Huggins, decided it was time to take action this year. “For a long time, I’ve been enamored with New Hampshire’s marshes and the immense biodiversity within them. Amphibians in particular are so fascinating the more you understand about their natural history, and for years now have been doing surveys on migration evenings, and they are so amazing to observe. On the flip side, I’ve seen the devastation even light traffic can have on roads cutting through these areas of great importance to wildlife, and once you see the problem firsthand, it’s hard to turn away! It has meant everything to me being able to brainstorm with others on the Nottingham Conservation Commission, and come up with a plan to protect our local amphibians, within our means; most just don’t know the situation or realize what a difference they can make by simply staying home, so we’re hoping spreading awareness is key” shares Dallas.



Dallas Huggins helping a salamander across the road

Dallas worked with the Town of Nottingham's Select Board, road agents, and Conservation Commission to create signs that could go up during Big Nights in identified amphibian habitats. These signs would remind folks to slow down or skip their evening errand until the following day to avoid any amphibian mortality. A social media campaign brought further awareness about the reason for the signs and encouraged folks to get out and explore these species during these special nights, and document and even report any threatened or endangered species they may have helped across the road. The effort was a success in educating citizens about the movements and encouraging them to get outside and connect with nature while assisting these tiny animals safely on their journey. Nottingham Conservation Commission and Planning Board Member, Sue Mooney, reflected "growing up in rural NH we always assisted turtles crossing roads and avoided frogs when driving after dark. And I still do. It's important to protect all living things and their habitats. To be part of this local outreach initiative provides personal gratification that I am helping these creatures survive during their annual spring migrations."



Because of all Dallas and others' work, this Yellow Spotted Salamander safely crossed the road.

Kristen Lamb is the Executive Director of [the Center for Wildlife](#) in Cape Neddick, Maine, and a member of the Nottingham Conservation Commission.

