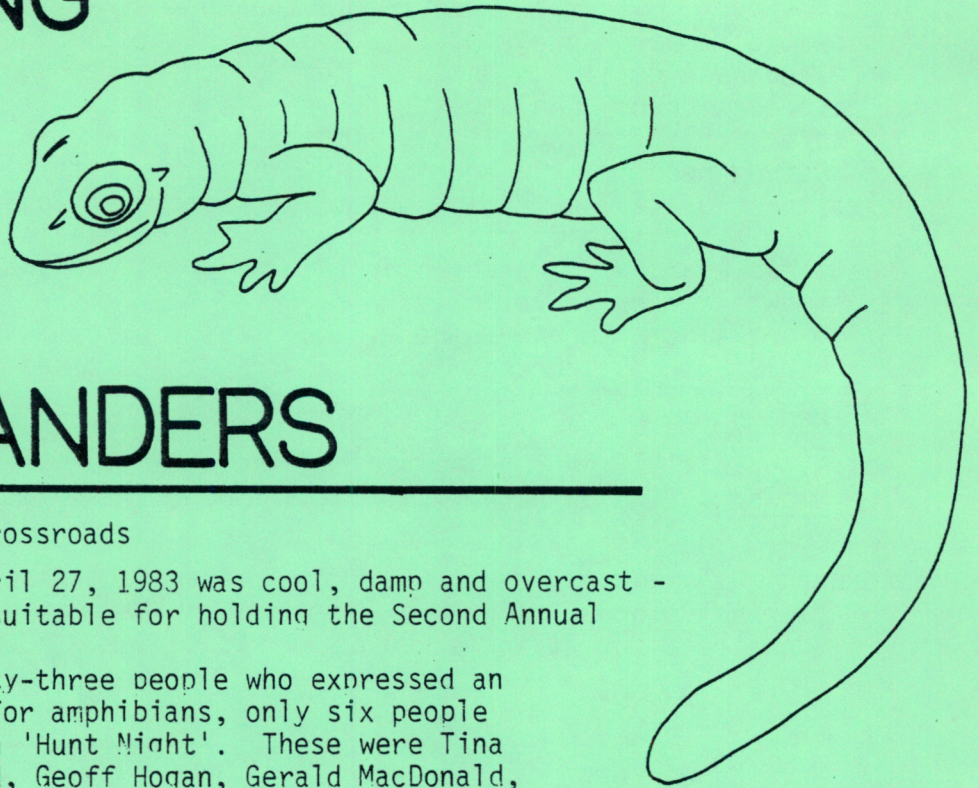


TRACKING DOWN THE FIRST SALAMANDERS



by Arlene MacGuigan, Crossroads

The evening of April 27, 1983 was cool, damp and overcast - conditions considered suitable for holding the Second Annual Amphibian Hunt.

Of a list of twenty-three people who expressed an interest in searching for amphibians, only six people were able to make it on 'Hunt Night'. These were Tina Brajsa, David MacDonald, Geoff Hogan, Gerald MacDonald, Joyce MacLeod and myself.

We met in front of the "Y" and headed straight for the place where we had the most success last year - a swamp in the Johnston's River area. When we arrived and began walking down the muddy road close to the marsh, the air was filled with the music of spring peepers, frogs and toads. Overhead, surrounding us, we could hear the sound of snipe winnowing and also the very distinctive sound of numerous woodcock performing their display flights. However, it was just a bit too dark to catch a glimpse of them.

As we scanned the roadsides and ditches for a glimpse of a salamander, we wondered aloud why they were so scarce. Last year's count revealed about thirty salamanders of two species, and we had found them in a relatively short time.

Meanwhile, some members of the group were searching the reeds and water for frogs and toads. Eventually we caught a total of five spring peepers and one wood frog. As we continued to look, our efforts were rewarded. Salamanders! When we counted up the total number of amphibians that had been deposited in the bucket provided, we found that we had 17 blue-spotted and 2 yellow-spotted salamanders, 5 spring peepers and 1 wood frog.

Before returning home, we returned all of our little friends to the pond, except for one of each species which was kept for showing to members of the Natural History Society at the next meeting. Many pictures of these amphibians in their natural environment were taken by one of the group members using special camera equipment for taking pictures at night.

Editor's Note: On the same night two Montague area members headed out to the ditches and swamps of Kilmuir, Brooklyn, Milltown Cross and Caledonia. Unfortunately the day's rains had petered out, and roads had begun to dry up, making the evening a less than ideal one for 'salamandering'. However, the songs of the spring peeper were heard everywhere, and wood frogs were also heard at two locations. Two spring peepers were captured and later released.