

How to Host an Amphibian Night Hike



Consider the type of event you want to host.

Do you love amphibians, but don't have much experience capturing and handling them? Consider hosting an observational amphibian hike (i.e., only looking, not handling amphibians), and see considerations outlined below.

Are you a herpetologist, or do you have experience capturing and handling amphibians and want to give participants an up close look at individual amphibians? If so, see considerations outlined below as well as those in *Part II: Additional Considerations for Capturing and Handling Amphibians*.

Before the Event: Planning and Preparation

1. Select a Suitable Location

- Choose a natural area with a known amphibian population, such as wetlands, forests, or areas near ponds or streams.
- Try to pre-scout the area to see what species are present and to learn what the terrain is like and any potential hazards (such as steep or muddy slopes). Consider items like the width of the trail and how easy it is for a group to navigate.
- Ensure the location is accessible and safe for participants during the proposed time of the event (e.g., day and/or night). Identify trails or paved areas that are accessible for people with limited mobility. Consider hosting multiple walks in multiple locations, with at least one walk offering experience for all ability levels.
- Use tools like [iNaturalist](#) to see what observations have been made in the area and note the timing of those observations (e.g., were they at night?).

2. Obtain Necessary Permits and/or Permission

- Check with local authorities or park management to secure any required permissions for nighttime activity. State and city-managed lands often need additional permission for access; contact local area wildlife managers, parks department personnel (email or phone call) for permission prior to any activities. **NOTE:** It can take a month or more to be granted a permit, so plan accordingly.
- Consider enlisting local naturalists to join in! Try to aim to have at least 1 trip leader per 10 participants to keep group sizes manageable and to allow for interaction.

3. Choose the Right Time

- Plan the hike during amphibian activity peaks, typically spring or early summer evenings after rain.
- Select a start time just after sunset to maximize amphibian sightings.

4. Promote the Event

- Advertise through community boards, social media, or local nature organizations. Consider partnering with the natural area you plan to visit to promote the event.
- Include details like location, start time, duration, and any necessary equipment (e.g. water, snacks, flashlight/headlamp, binoculars, waders or water shoes). Add details about accessibility (e.g., if the trail is easy to walk on, how long the hike will be, if there are restrooms).
- Create a registration form for participants to sign up and to provide contact information. An example form can be [found here](#).

5. Prepare Equipment

- If you are able, provide flashlights or headlamps with red filters (to reduce light disturbance), or ask that people bring their own.
- Carry a first aid kit and insect repellent.
- Prepare field foot wash stations for participants.
- Field Equipment Disinfection Protocols, Disinfection and Decontamination can be found at [this link](#).

6. Plan Educational Content

- Prepare a brief introduction about local amphibians, their importance to ecosystems, and conservation efforts.
- Prepare information to explain why it is important to disinfect footwear and how some amphibian declines are due to disease/pathogens.
- Create a checklist of species participants might see.
- Prepare to teach people to use a light and binoculars at night.

7. Send Reminder Email to Registrants

- Advise participants to wear sturdy shoes, weather-appropriate clothing, and bring water.
- Share Disinfection Protocols in advance, but let participants know there will be a footwear wash station.
- Remind participants to be quiet and respectful of wildlife.
- Provide information about meeting location, how to contact organizers, and remind participants about the basic details of the hike.

- If time allows, provide links to frog calls participants might hear
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During the Event: Execution

1. Conduct a Quick Pre-Walk Right Before Event

- Quickly walk the planned route to identify any potential hazards (e.g., holes, muddy spots).
- Look for items you can point out to participants (e.g., egg masses, a predation event, signs from other animals).

2. Welcome and Briefing

- Greet participants warmly and conduct a short safety briefing on how to keep themselves and wildlife safe. Consider having participants sign a liability waiver.
- Have participants disinfect their footwear.
- Explain hike rules, such as staying on the trail, no touching or disturbing wildlife, and sticking with the group.
- Consider adding a group introduction activity where everyone says their name and their favorite amphibian and/or what they hope to see.

3. Educational Introduction

- Share a quick talk about amphibians, their habitats, and the significance of conserving them.
- Point out what participants should listen for, such as frog calls or rustling leaves.
- Describe how to approach calling frogs slowly and quietly, and how they can use lights and binoculars at a distance.
- Encourage moments of complete silence so people can record calling frogs.

4. Lead the Hike

- Walk at a slow, steady pace to allow for observations.
- Pause occasionally to listen for sounds or spotlight amphibians.
- Highlight interesting behaviors or features of species spotted.
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5. Encourage Participation

- Allow participants to ask questions or share observations.
- Hand out checklists or encourage participants to record sightings on a nature app.

6. Safety Monitoring

- Ensure everyone stays together and adheres to the rules.
 - Address any issues, such as a lost flashlight or someone feeling unwell, promptly.
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After the Event: Wrap-Up and Follow-Up

- 1. Conclude with Reflection**
 - Gather the group to discuss the species spotted and share favorite moments.
 - Remind participants of ways they can contribute to amphibian conservation.
 - Have participants disinfect their shoes/boots.
- 2. Provide Additional Resources**
 - Offer links to conservation organizations, amphibian guides, or community science projects via a handout sheet or a QR code for participants to scan.
- 3. Collect Feedback**
 - Ask participants for feedback to improve future events.
 - Provide a simple survey or encourage verbal comments.
- 4. Clean Up**
 - Ensure no trash is left behind.
 - Check that all equipment is accounted for.
- 5. Document the Event**
 - Take note of the species observed and share highlights (with permission) on social media or community boards. NOTE: get permission to use photos from the people in the photo. Or, use photos that show the amphibian being observed, and only the backs of the participants.
- 6. Follow-Up Communication**
 - Send a thank-you email to participants, including a summary of the event and any notable findings.
 - Invite them to future hikes or related activities.

These steps will help ensure a successful, educational, and enjoyable amphibian night hike!

PART II: Additional Considerations for those capturing and handling amphibians for live animal demonstrations

- 1. Select a Suitable Location**
 - Determine if only you (and assistants) will enter wet areas/water or are inviting participants into shallows.
 - During scouting, determine how amphibians might be captured and temporarily held for educational demonstration (where will participants wait? Is access for capturing safe?). For example, will amphibians be held in a plastic bag with a bit of water (e.g., a frog)? Or a small clear box with moist substrate (e.g., a toad or salamander)?
- 2. Obtain Necessary Permits and/or Permission**

- Check with local authorities or park management to secure any required permissions or permits for capture and handling amphibians that may be present.
- Be aware that these requirements are likely in addition to permits for access to localities and will need to be met.

3. Be Mindful of Well-Being of Captured Amphibians

- While much can be gained from live amphibian demonstrations, be mindful of stress to individual animals. Consider using clean and disinfected plastic containers or buckets for viewing. Be sure animals have an appropriate amount of water for species or life form. Minimize holding time and spread interactions across multiple individual animals if possible (e.g., capture 2 frogs so that each frog is observed up close by only a few participants before release).
- Only the event leader (who is a herpetologist or has capture and handling experience with amphibians) should capture animals. This will protect amphibians at the site from being injured unintentionally by well-intended but poorly executed captures and capture attempts.
- Determine if participants will be able to handle captured amphibians or only observe them (e.g., a plastic bag with a frog could be passed around for an up-close look, but participants don't actually handle the animal).

4. Prepare Equipment

- Bring dip nets, plastic containers/critter keepers (i.e., plastic boxes made for holding small animals), field guides, amphibian ID cards, or apps.
- If participants enter shallows, consider recommended footwear (e.g., rubber knee boots, hip waders, waders)
- Have hand sanitizer, biodegradable wipes, plastic baggies, and nitrile gloves available. Participants should not handle amphibians without gloves. .
- Clean and disinfect all equipment such as dip nets, holding containers, and buckets prior to the event, and at the end of the event.