

Where Did That Pond Go?

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Have you ever noticed a very wet area or smallish pond in spring and then wondered, come summer, where it went? It's likely you've observed a vernal pond.

Vernal ponds, also known as vernal pools, are unique, temporary wetlands that usually occur in late winter through early summer. They are essential breeding grounds for many amphibian species that are rarely encountered throughout the rest of the year. While not predator-free, the ponds don't have fish which makes them great places for young amphibians to grow.



On a rainy night (or nights), usually in March, when temperatures rise above 40 degrees, at High Point State Park and surrounding areas, spotted salamanders, blue spotted salamanders, wood frogs, Jefferson salamanders, and spring peepers emerge from hibernation and migrate to vernal ponds. These amphibians will spend the next week or two mating and laying eggs and will then disappear back into the woods, under rocks, logs, and underground where they live the rest of the year. Tadpoles and larval salamanders that hatch in vernal ponds are in a race to mature before their

ponds dry out. By June or July, the ponds are often mere puddles, or are completely gone, and the tiny salamanders and frogs have walked and hopped off into the woods. They won't return to the ponds until it is their turn to breed.



Other creatures also live in these ponds. Red-spotted newts are common, as well as several aquatic insects, fairy shrimp, and some birds, like wood ducks.