

September 1, 2000

The

summer has flown by, and we're busy surveying all of this year's new frogs. Our goal at each site is to collect 100 metamorph frogs. Unfortunately, this isn't always possible, so we have a time limit if frogs are scarce. We catch the frogs with butterfly nets as they are swimming in the ponds or sitting on shore. We keep them in buckets and then go through them one by one. We measure their length from the tip of their nose to the back of their body (not including the hind legs). We then examine them and document any malformations. If it's an especially unique malformation, we photograph it using a macro lens and slide film.

This

year, at our main sites, we are also marking the frogs to see if we are recapturing the same frogs at each visit. It gives us a sense of the population size. It also will help to tell us if inflated numbers of abnormal frogs at some sites late in the season are merely because the normal frogs have hopped away or if there are new abnormal frogs emerging. We are marking them by clipping off one of the toes on their front foot. We don't clip off the entire toe, but enough so that when we recapture them, we can tell we've seen them before. It's possible to differentiate between our clipping and an abnormal toe because the clipped toe forms visible scar tissue. This is an injury that we have rarely seen in past seasons, so almost any frog we catch with this toe shortened, we've caught before and marked. This is a method of marking that has been used by other researchers before. It was hard for us to do at first, but luckily it doesn't bleed, and the frogs swim around in the bucket afterwards like nothing has changed

We

have seen quite a few malformed frogs again this year. Some of the most frequent abnormalities we see are reduced or missing hind digits, reduced segments of the hind limbs, and cutaneous fusion on the hind limbs. Cutaneous fusion is like extra webbing, and we mostly see it between the femur and the tibiofibula. It can be on one or both legs. If it's an extreme case, the frog's leg is permanently bent and makes it difficult for the frog to swim or jump. We also have seen some extra hind limbs, eye problems, and bone bridges where the bone (such as the femur) is v-shaped under the skin, but still connected (e.g. still meets the hip joint and knee).

We'll continue surveying into October, depending on what happens with the weather and frogs. Enjoy the end of summer weather!

- MPCA Frog Crew