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Vernal pool discovery, Redback salamanders

by Makayla Z

On Tuesday, April 25, at 9:45 AM, my class and I went on a walk for science class at the Fuller Forest preserve. I was surrounded by thick dense forests and larger vernal pools. I could hear birds and peepers throughout the woods. The water was very murky, although beautiful water lilies were scattered about the surface. When we started looking in one of the two pools, we found just a few caddisflies but no redback salamanders in sight. *Why were there no salamanders?* We started to look around one of the other vernal pools, and we



Fig. 1: photo of redback salamander, Pierson, Todd. Southern Redback Salamander." *Amphibians and Reptiles of North America*," NCPARC.

found out that a lot of people had discovered many different animals. I noticed that one of the two vernal pools had a much greater amount of animal life. This pool had a snake, a redback salamander (see Fig. 1), peepers, frogs, and multiple egg masses. There were almost no animals found in the first pool.

This observation stood out to me because I had learned that the organisms in the vernal pools were going to be common and easy to find. I was not expecting there to be almost no organisms visible in the first vernal pool. I knew we were going during a time when we should see some creatures. *Were there too many predators in the first vernal pool? Was there not enough food for the salamanders in my pool?* These are a few questions I wondered about.

After some research, I figured out that there could have been more predators of the redback salamander in the first vernal pool, which includes: birds, snakes, and large mammals. Another piece of information I found was that salamanders eat mostly small organisms. Their diet consists of worms, snails, ants, larvae, and insects. The first vernal pool could have had a more reliable and larger source of food containing the small insect they consume.

In conclusion, the second vernal pool had more prey and fewer predators of the redback salamander. I could investigate this issue further by studying the environment closely and finding the differences between other vernal pools and different environments. I could also compare the most beneficial and detrimental factors in both vernal pools.

Bibliography

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