

How to go herping

The reptile and amphibian equivalent to birding!
by Jackson Roberts

LSU | Museum of
Natural Science



But first, safety disclaimer!

Here at the LSU Museum of Natural Sciences, we practice safe animal practices, which includes respecting the animals we find in order to keep both the animal and us safe. For this reason, please do not touch, handle, or harass any snake, even if you think it is nonvenomous. Many of Louisiana's nonvenomous snakes mimic our venomous snakes very well, and thus it is best to exhibit caution and give every snake a respectful distance. Snakes are beautiful and valuable members of our ecosystem that help our environment in so many ways. Always give snakes space. Thanks, from the LSUMNS Herpetology Division!

Frequently asked questions:

So what is herping?

Herping is the searching for wild amphibians and reptiles out in nature. It is the Herpetology equivalent to birding!

Where can I go herping?

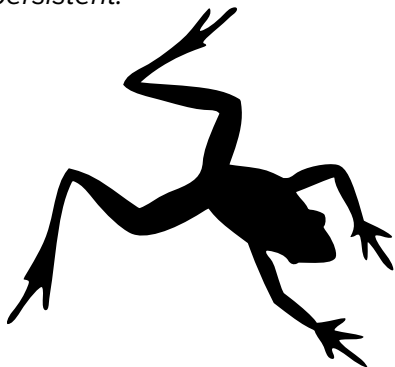
Almost anywhere! Many reptiles and amphibians are quite resilient and can survive, and thrive, in the city as well as "off the beaten path". However, to increase your chances of finding more species and more individuals, it's best to try hiking in intact forest or woods, such as the many BREC parks around Baton Rouge! A great place I tell people to visit for their first time herping is Bluebonnett Swamp! The staff at Bluebonnett swamp even have many reptiles and amphibians in tanks in the visitor center!

When is the best time to go herping?

Well, that depends on what you want to find! Snakes are my favorite, so I do most of my herping from spring to early fall before it gets too cold! However, many amphibians such as salamanders are most active in the cold wet months of Louisiana winter because they are out trying to lay eggs.

What will I need to go herping?

I prefer rubber boots, a flashlight, water, snacks, a camera (or cell phone), and patience! Reptiles and amphibians are masters of camouflage and secrecy, so it may take a while to learn their habits. Very often I go herping and find only a few, so do not get discouraged! Be patient and persistent!



Protocol for herping!

So, you have reached your destination where you want to herp!
What's next?

1. First, if you are on public land such as a BREC park, be vigilant for signs and postings to ensure you stay on trail and abide by the rules of park and landowners.



2. Once you have found a safe trail to walk, begin slowly hiking with your eyes and ears open! To be honest, most snakes and lizards I find are actually with my ears first. They are quick to slither and run away, and sometimes they make quite a bit of noise when they do!



3. If it is hot outside and the sun is shining brightly, be on the lookout for herps that are basking, or soaking in the sun. Remember, reptiles and amphibians are both cold-blooded, so they need the sun to heat up their bodies in order to be active.



4. A good place to find herps is also by water. Many frogs, snakes, turtles, and alligators will bask at the water's edge!

5. Sometimes when it is cooler and the sun is not out, reptiles and amphibians will take cover under logs, rocks, and even trash, such as sheets of tin. You can gently lift these items to see if animals are hiding underneath. However, only flip these items if you can safely do so without sticking your hands and fingers blindly under the object to lift. Sometimes, venomous snakes will be under cover, and you must always watch where you are putting your hands and feet.



Disclaimer: it is illegal to rip logs and trees apart on public lands, such as parks. If you cannot gently roll the log and inspect for animals, then the log is too big and should be left alone. Whenever you flip or roll anything, always be sure to put the item back identical to the way it was found.

However, if you find a salamander or frog under a log, please safely and gently “scoot” the critter by nudging its tail or rump with your finger to get the animal safely to the side of the log. This will ensure that the animal is not crushed when you roll the log back. Don’t worry! They find their way back to their sweet spot under the log after you leave! For more tips on ethical herping, see the “Additional Resources” section at the end of this activity sheet.

So you found a herp! What do you do?

1) Be sure to take a picture! I always try to document the critters I find when I go herping because it is always so much fun to look back and have a picture to remember the day! You can also keep a **“Life List”** of all the animals (even non-herps) that you see in your many days of exploring.

Beginner's Life List	
1)	_____
2)	_____
3)	_____
4)	_____
5)	_____
6)	_____
7)	_____
8)	_____
9)	_____
10)	_____

2) Always remember to respect these animals. We should always give these critters space and respect, even the ones that are not venomous. Louisiana frogs and salamanders are harmless to us, but they have very absorbent and delicate skin that can be damaged by handling them. The salts and oils on our hands can make them sick, especially when our hands are covered in sunblock and bug spray! So, while we may be tempted to grab everything we see, remember that a photo is **ALWAYS** safer for both the animals and us.



3) Lastly, share your pictures and stories with your friends and family! You may know someone very close to you that thinks frogs are gross, and that snakes are scary. But it is up to us herpers to convince people that these animals are special, and that they need our protection. At the very least, we can teach our friends and family that just because an animal scares you, or grosses you out, it doesn't mean that that animal deserves to be hurt.



Beginner's Life List

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Beginner's Life List

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Additional Resources

BREC - Parks & Recreation in East Baton Rouge Parish

<https://www.brec.org/>

Louisiana Amphibian and Reptile Enthusiasts (L.A.R.E.) – guides for identification

<http://www.louisianaherps.com/louisiana-amphibian-and.html>

Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Conservation – species field guide

<https://www.wlf.louisiana.gov/species>

Save the Salamanders – tips for ethical herping

<https://www.savethesalamanders.com/ethical-field-herping-guidelines>



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