



## Country Walks Revisited: Early Spring and Staying Alive

**During January we experienced unusually warm temperatures here, thanks in large part to El Nino, a cyclic warming of the Pacific Ocean's surface.**

*Cherie Langlois*

Wednesday, February 3, 2010

Photo by Kelsey Langlois

Are chorusing tree frogs signaling the beginning of spring? During January we experienced unusually warm temperatures here, thanks in large part to El Nino, a cyclic warming of the Pacific Ocean's surface.

This spring-like weather has been wonderful for escaping outside to walk the country roads around my farm, but it also seems to have caused confusion among the local animals and plants. Or maybe they know something we humans don't?

Could winter be over already?

For instance, last week my friend and I discovered (and rescued) a little rough-skinned newt, which should have been hibernating still, moving in slow motion across the road. Then, returning home, I spotted a purple primrose in full bloom. Yesterday, we passed a clump of pussy willows covered in furry catkins, and later I heard tree frogs chorusing, another harbinger of spring around here.

I've noticed the warmer weather has lured more people out to walk or run our country roads this winter. Since I've also observed too many rural pedestrians flirting with disaster, I'd like to share a few road walking safety tips.

1. Walk or run facing traffic. Walking on the left side of the road (on the shoulder if possible), facing oncoming traffic, can allow you to take evasive action if needed. The only time I break this rule is when I'm on a blind hill or curve where oncoming cars can't see me. Also, when I hear a vehicle approach from behind, I cast glances over my shoulder to check that it's in the right lane, or that another car hasn't pulled out to pass it.
2. Look, listen and stay alert. Walking on a road is not the time to text, yak on your cell-phone, listen to your I-Pod and/or daydream (though I admit I'm guilty of the latter). Defensive walking means keeping your senses alert.
3. Make yourself visible, assume you're invisible. Don bright colors (neon yellow really stands out), use reflective clothing and a light at dusk (better yet, don't walk when visibility is poor), and assume you're invisible to drivers. For example, if someone is pulling out from a drive or side road, I won't cross in front unless he stops, catches my eye and motions for me to proceed.
4. Use positive reinforcement. I always give a wave and smile to drivers who politely move over to allow me plenty of space, or who wait until an approaching car passes to proceed. Hopefully, this positive reinforcement will increase the likelihood they'll give me room next time, too, as well as drive safely past the next pedestrian they meet.

~ Cherie

« More Country Discovery »