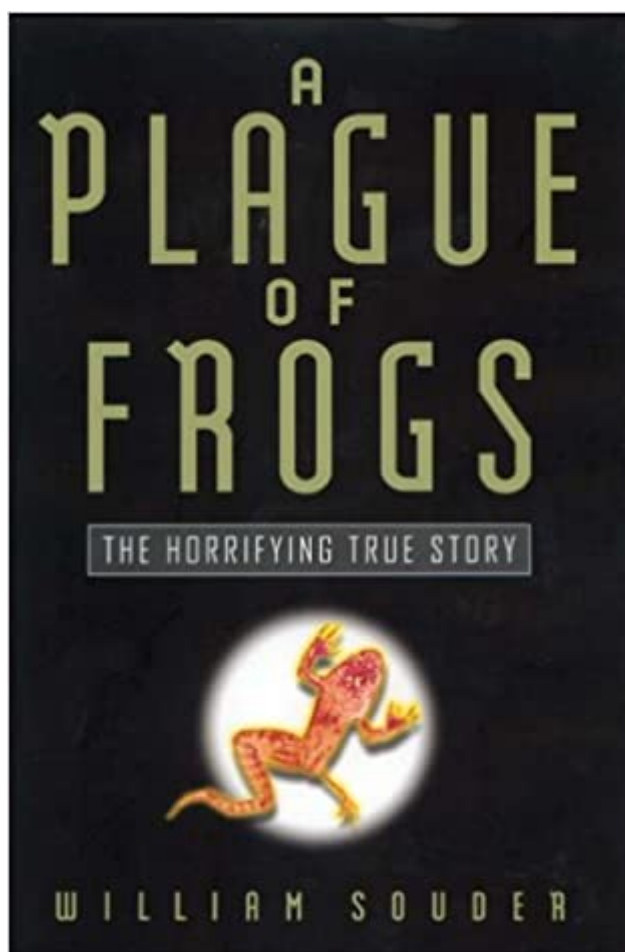


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# A Plague Of Frogs : The Horrifying True Story



## Synopsis

In the summer of 1995, a group of Minnesota children came upon a pond populated by frogs with nine legs, missing legs, a row of limbs fanning out from their backsides, and eyes in the wrong places. Since then, deformed frogs have been turning up in lakes around the world. Written by the only journalist granted access to secret hot spots where these deformed frogs are tested, and brainstorming sessions among the researchers, this compelling, fast-paced narrative is the first to offer a complete picture of what is quite possibly a global catastrophe in the making.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

In 1995, Minnesota schoolchildren at play in a field discovered a strange thing: a pond full of frogs with five legs, nine legs, sometimes no legs, frogs with misplaced eyes and misshapen bodies. Their discovery might well have been overlooked had not Environmental Protection Agency researchers Gary Ankley and Joe Tietge taken an interest in the matter, linking the Minnesota frogs to other amphibian and fish populations that had been exhibiting monstrous patterns of mutation. William Souder, a science journalist, takes us into the workings of EPA labs and government hearing rooms as he traces the story, which quickly became politicized: some scientists sought the origins of the "frog plague" in viruses, others in fungi, others in chemicals; still others maintained that frogs and other amphibians are subject to large-scale mutations for seemingly no cause at all, and a large literature supports their view. Looking at the bigger picture of global warming and environmental change, Souder suggests that multiple causes may be responsible for the Minnesota frogs'

misfortune--and for the decline of frog populations around the world. His vigorous, anecdotal narrative is a fine report on scientific detective work and on the politics of environmental science in an increasingly fractious time. --Gregory McNamee

The world's frogs are disappearing, and frog deformities are proliferating--a potential warning sign of a looming, environmentally triggered human health disaster. That's the message of this shocking and important report from journalist Souder, who broke this story in the Washington Post after a group of Minnesota schoolchildren found abnormal frogs with horribly deformed, extra or missing limbs in a farm pond in 1995. While outbreaks of amphibian limb deformities have been recorded for more than two centuries, the current crop of abnormalities is particularly widespread and numerous--affecting up to 50% of some frog species, with reports pouring in from California and Vermont to Canada and Japan, and involving leg, mouth, bone and other deformities in frogs, toads and salamanders. Although the cause of this nightmare remains a mystery, Souder, who visited research labs, interviewed biologists and hunted frogs across the country, ranks pesticides as the prime suspect. Many scientists, he explains, believe that substances that mimic hormones in the environment--pesticides, solvents, dioxin, plastics, natural compounds--are wreaking developmental havoc in wildlife and humans. Souder's labyrinthine investigation also impartially reviews rival theories blaming frog deformities on parasites, disease, predation, traumatic amputation, acid rain, climate change, ultraviolet exposure resulting from a hole in the ozone layer, or some combination of these factors. Because frogs are considered a sentinel species--a kind of biological early-warning system of environmental imbalance--Souder's intriguing scientific detective story, though inconclusive, deserves a wide readership, and his low-keyed, cautious approach adds to its impact. Agent, Elyse Cheney of Sanford J. Greenburger Associates; 3-city author tour. (Mar.) Copyright 2000 Reed Business Information, Inc.

I must disagree with the reviewer who referred to William Souder's "A Plague of Frogs: The Horrifying True Story" as a 'silly' book. This book was at once horrifying, fascinating, spellbinding, and thought-provoking. It also appears to be well-researched: Souder followed the story for more than three years and he references more than one hundred texts and technical papers at the end of the book. This is no 'silly' book. I cannot agree with the same reviewer who described the book as 'biased journalism.' In my opinion, Souder presents an intriguing but balanced look at the problem and the efforts of scientists to understand it. Anyone with even a slight interest in our environment should read this book. You won't be able to put it down!When I saw the cover of the book, with its

photograph of a deformed frog, I remembered seeing newscasts in the mid-90s about the discovery of large numbers of frogs with deformed legs. Missing legs, missing toes, extra legs, extra feet, underdeveloped legs and other anomalies were being discovered in frightening quantities. There were frogs with as many as nine legs. There were frogs whose feet were webbed to their torsos such that they could not extend their back legs and jump normally. I was at once intrigued and repulsed by the descriptions and photographs of some of these specimens. What DID cause these deformed frogs? I could not remember seeing a follow-up newscast with the resolution of the mystery of this outbreak or 'plague.' I was hooked. After buying the book, I raced through it. Souder's style was similar to that of any good mystery writer - gradually relaying the story as it unfolded during the months and years that he followed it. But here, the story is true and the detectives are scientists. What I found most horrifying is that despite all of our knowledge and technology, this mystery defied solution. Surely with all of our advances in science we could solve this problem. Right? But the mystery persisted for months and YEARS. Souder teases the reader as the story unfolds. I kept waiting for the 'answer' to be found. In the process, Souder revealed the debate and conflict among the various scientists - each of whom had areas of specialty and expertise that were possible 'suspects' in the mystery. Were the deformities caused by parasites? How about man-made chemicals? Was this part of a naturally occurring cycle of occasional genetic bloopers? Or was something very amiss in the frog's environment? Souder's book reveals the sometimes petty squabbles between scientists and researchers, who, despite their intelligence, are just as human as you or I. He also shows us the lack of organization, overabundance of red tape and bureaucracy, and the lack of funding for solving this mystery. I don't want to give away the 'answer,' so I'll just say that the ending was not what I expected. I'd still read the book again ... and probably will.

Mr. Souder has the rare ability to bring abstruse science to life without bias or over-simplification. He is also a keen observer of the human species and its political interactions. This is indeed "the horrifying true story," one I wish would go away; yet the author's presentation is dispassionate, thorough, and as non-alarmist as possible for a subject this spooky. The book offers a good overview of current environmental science research in addition to its difficult detective story: what's responsible for these massive levels of gross deformities in frogs?

This book begins in the summer of 1995 when a group of school children in Minnesota found some frogs whose limbs were malformed. The book covers the scientist who investigated the discovery

and the research that was done to figure out how this occurred and what the cause was. Deformed frogs have turned up in large numbers across the United States and Canada. In Minnesota, at the epicenter of the outbreak deformed frogs were found at three separate locations in 1995. By early 1997, abnormal frogs had been reported at nearly 2000 sites in Minnesota, from one end of the state to the other. Chapter 4 tells of the discovery of deformed frogs in Montreal, Canada in July 1992. You'll learn all about Martin Ouellet who studied the frogs. You'll learn about all kinds of frogs, in detail (i.e. the Leopard frog, Wood frogs, the Northern Leopard frog, African clawed frog, Mink frog, Pacific tree frogs, etc.). Chapter 5 When the Fish Began to Walk - is mostly about the evolution of life forms and how the first bacteria were like seeds. Deep Time is discussed. Deep Time being so far back in time we can't comprehend, we can only dream of what it was like. The author then goes on to tell about the EPA and, in detail, the First North American Workshop on Amphibian Deformities on September 25, 1996. Now we have reached the debate of the cause of the deformities, parasites or chemicals. And now we learn about the NIEHS (National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences). You'll learn a lot about Methoprene, which is the active ingredient in a host of commonly used insecticides. The Biologist wanted to study the frogs and the toxicologists wanted to study the environment. The middle of the book contains glossy colored photographs of the deformed frogs along with pictures of the researchers and investigators who worked on this dilemma. In June 1997 the website for The National Reporting Center for Amphibian Malformations (NARCAM) was created. In the first year they received 560 reports of abnormal amphibians. Deformed frogs, toads and salamanders were discovered in 40 states and 3 Canadian provinces. The author goes on to tell of trematodes and how the deformed frogs are part of evolution. This book is about agencies and individuals who have theories about the deformed frogs. You'll hear about their experiments to support their theories. You'll hear them dismissing another's theory. The author's conclusion is that frogs are succumbing to parasites, to pesticides, to increases in ultra violet radiation and to global warming.

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