

Tales From Along the Trail...



It's Not Easy
Being Green; Spring's
Woodland Frog Chorus
with Naturalist Cathy Ricks



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amphibian
field guide



Spring Peeper
Tracey Johnson

As winter melts into spring something magical happens as woodland frogs emerge from their winter (and nearly frozen) hibernation. The date will never be on the calendar but transpires when the temperature approaches or exceeds about 45 degrees and a soft, spring rain falls that continues into the night.

The Spring Peeper, Wood Frog, Western Chorus Frog and Gray Treefrog can freeze almost as solid as a rock during hibernation. Spring's warming temperatures and rain will kick start their wake-up call. Relying on their slim, fall fat reserves they migrate to wetlands, ponds and vernal breeding pools.





Western Chorus Frog
Ryan Wolfe



Gray Treefrog
Tracey Johnson



Wood Frog
Tracey Johnson

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The male Wood Frogs are among the first singers with loud, duck-like quacking that explodes from vernal pools, becoming noticeably quiet if you try and sneak up. Wood Frogs only call and mate during a narrow time in early spring before disappearing back into the woods. Spring Peepers' loud, sleighbell-like chorus can be heard even as you are driving by wetlands in your car. Roll down the windows and enjoy the night music. The dime size, male treefrog uses a single, inflated vocal sac to create that loud "peep". Vernal pools are created by snowmelt and spring rain runoff, becoming important amphibian breeding grounds. They are sheltered and contain fewer predators than ponds but typically dry up by summer. Tadpoles must quickly metamorphose into adults. Tiny peeper "froglings" can be spotted along the damp edges in about 2 months. Spring Peepers' camouflage and size makes them almost impossible to find once they head back into the woodlands. In the autumn you may hear the males "fall echo" call as the temperatures and daylight drop. Sometimes joining the "peeper" chorus, is the elusive Western Chorus Frog whose "creek" call sounds like a fingernail running along the teeth of a comb.

The Gray Treefrogs have a bird-like slow trill call. They are masters of disguise with the chameleon-like ability to change colors (brown, gray or green). They have sticky, rounded toe disks that can climb up your windows in summer while hunting for insects under the porch lights. Gray Treefrogs will even lay their eggs in the puddles of water left on swimming pool covers before heading back up into the tree canopy.

American Toads' long, sweet trill can be heard in spring even in quiet pockets of the Cuyahoga River as well as ponds in our parks. In the fall they dig an overwintering burrow below the frost line or move into someone else's. At the end of winter, when the ground begins to warm up, they head to breeding ponds. The males trill is a signal to start looking for the females' distinctive, long strings of several thousand eggs. Tadpoles will metamorphose into tiny "toadlets" within a few weeks and hang around the nursery pond before making their way into gardens and woods.

To become a citizen scientist with Frog Watch, learn more about Ohio's Amphibians, their declining populations or hear frog calls check out our resources. There are more frog species to learn about as spring unfolds. A friend spotted an otter taking advantage of a frog chorus as a snack bar. Enjoy your own Tales along the Trails adventures.



American Toad



Happy Tales, Cathy Ricks.

