

## Nature Notes for Hikers #2 -- by Andrea Howard, May 2020

### Frog notes – Tree Frogs

All Ontario frogs can be seen and heard at <https://ontarionature.org/programs/citizen-science/reptile-amphibian-atlas>

It is always the male frog that we hear, calling for a female when he is ready to mate. Several frogs calling together are referred to as a *chorus*. The eight species of frogs in eastern Ontario are heard at different times in spring and summer, depending on when they awaken from their winter sleep and how long their mating season lasts.

Last time I wrote about Leopard Frog migration from rivers and creeks to the still water of a wetland. When they finally reach their destination, their mating call will sound like a thumb rubbing on a wet balloon – no distinctive note or musicality. It may be hard to distinguish it in the chorus.

The spring chorus begins with the tree frogs. We have four species, listed below in order of their awakening.

#### Boreal Chorus Frog (*Pseudacris maculata*)

- call is like a big fingernail on a loud comb – steady, measured, tone rises a tad at end
- first frog heard, day and night, in early spring even before snow disappears
- heard in forest edges, willow swamps, roadside ditches and flooded old-fields
- the tiniest of tree frogs, very hard to spot; smooth-skinned, green with side stripes in dark and light

#### Wood Frog (*Lithobates sylvaticus*)

- makes a *tuk tuk* that sounds a bit like knocking on a small hard door
- dozens of them together sound more like ducks clucking and quaking.
- start calling shortly after Chorus Frogs until early to mid-May, late afternoon to dusk
- heard in wooded areas adjacent to temporary or permanent wetlands
- illusive; thumb sized; have a distinctive black mask over eyes

### **Spring Peeper (*Pseudacris crucifer*)**

- sweet, high-pitched repetitive *peep*
- call from dusk to dawn from early spring, through much of the summer
- heard in permanent wetlands, usually among cattails
- second tiniest tree frog – loonie-sized at most; distinctive X on back (hence name)
- sometimes out on the road in the rain

### **Gray Tree Frog (*Hyla versicolor*)**

- a raspy trill on one clucky note
- begin in May and continue into summer, especially on warm damp days
- heard in tree-tops near mating pools
- bumpy skin with dark blotchy patches; bright orange behind
- well camouflaged, changing colour from bright green through gray and brown
- often seen on windows and walls hunting insects attracted to lights

All tree frogs excellent climbers, with little suction pads on the tips of their toes. All are also adapted to our winter by being freeze-tolerant. They have spent the winter nestled in a soft hiding place, above-ground -- in the leaf litter, up a tree in a crotch or a notch, in a cattail mat -- protected from physical harm during their frozen slumber. They might thaw out occasionally if it gets too warm, but they can refreeze multiple times. The physiological process is fascinating and is being studied in-depth by world-renowned Carleton University scientist, Doctor Kenneth Storey. He, his wife Janet and a succession of PhD students research a diversity of hibernation processes, with a view to eventually finding a way to preserve human organs. (I visited the Storey Lab in person, some 15 years ago; one can do it online but the site is not "secure" so I'll let you navigate there on your own. You can start with Ken at [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kenneth\\_B.\\_Storey](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kenneth_B._Storey).)