

Wildlife Diversity Notebook: Spring Peeper

By Karen McClure

Common Name: Spring Peeper

Scientific Name: *Pseudacris crucifer*

West Virginia Status: Common

Description: The spring peeper is a small, tan to gray frog which usually has an X-shaped darker brown mark on its back. Females are larger than males, possibly reaching 1½ inches long. Males are close to ¾ to one inch long. Both sexes have small toe disks. Males have enlarged thumbs, used during egg fertilization.

Habitat: Spring peepers live in wooded areas, but are most often noticed when they come to temporary puddles or vernal pools in late winter and early spring to sing and reproduce. These frogs are known to hop along the forest floor, and hide under the leaf litter, not in trees like “treefrogs.” Spring peepers are so well camouflaged and quiet when not singing that they go unnoticed by the average hiker.

Diet: Like all frogs in West Virginia, spring peepers are carnivores, eating a variety of invertebrates, mostly spiders, ants and beetles. Spring peepers are not known to eat aquatic species, only terrestrial organisms.

Range: Spring peepers live in the eastern half of the United States, except for southern Florida. They also live in southeastern Canada. In West Virginia, spring peepers live throughout the state.

Life History: In spring, when the temperatures and photoperiods (length of days and nights) are just right and a good rain comes along, the males move downhill to find a pool of water, sometimes singing on the way. This pool can be a permanent pond, a puddle, or a roadside ditch. Males sing individually or in small to large choruses, depending on the local population size. These calls, which many mountaineers love to hear as a sign of spring, lure females



Tom Allen

The darker brown X-shaped mark on the back is a key characteristic of the spring peeper.



Kieran O'Malley

out of the relative safety of the woods. Males are more abundant than females at the pools at any one time.

As the females arrive, males fertilize the eggs which attach to plants under water. The females return to the woods after laying their eggs, while the males wait around for more females to arrive. The eggs hatch in a few days. The tadpoles, which are herbivores, transform into froglets (immature frogs) in about three months. Egg and larval development are dependent on temperature and rainfall. A warm, dry season will speed up the process, while a cool, wet one will slow it down, resulting in larger froglets.

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