

Kidz' n Nature
Outdoor Wonders: Frog Serenade
By Suzanne Kahn Eder

Spring has sprung and amphibious frogs are waking from their long winter slumbers! Wander around a pond or wetland in the evening hours and you are bound to hear the early spring songs of the spring peeper and wood frog. Their chorus is one of my most favorite signs of spring.

Spring peepers are the smallest frogs in Maine. They are named for the characteristic peeping sound that the males sing at night to attract mates. If you are ever lucky enough to find one of these tree frogs and see it up close, you will notice a dark "x" shape on its back. Even with this marking, they are tricky to spot because they are so tiny. Peepers are only an inch long, but they can leap a distance of 17 inches! Can you jump like a spring peeper? Measure your body length from head to toe, multiply that number by 17, then set up a measuring tape and see if you can make your own version of the spring peeper leap!

Unlike many of their more aquatic relatives, wood frogs spend the winter months under leaves and mats of moss in the forest. They are one of the first frogs in Maine to emerge in the spring. The adult wood frog has a black band across its eyes, making it look like it's wearing a mask! When males sing, they sound a bit like quacking ducks. Of all the frog songs I have heard, those of wood frogs sound most like the common "ribbit" that is attributed to frogs. Wood frogs are two inches long—twice as large as peepers—and are at home in forest habitats. In the spring, they search for vernal pools for mating and egg-laying. Because they dry up for a portion of the year, these small temporary pools of water do not have any fish predators that would find tadpoles tasty. Vernal pools are ideal nurseries for all sorts of little frogs.

Some other frog friends that you are likely to hear as spring moves into summer include bullfrogs and green frogs. Bullfrogs are the largest frog in North America. Many children tell me that the "jug-a-rummm" song of a bullfrog reminds them of a cow's "mooo." Green frogs are smaller than bullfrogs and have a song that sounds like someone is plucking the strings of a banjo. I was once kept up all night on a camping trip listening to the "unck, unck, unck" serenade of a pond full of green frogs.

One of my favorite resources for exploring the frogs of Maine is *Maine Amphibians and Reptiles*, edited by Malcolm L. Hunter, et al. and published by The University of Maine Press. It comes complete with a CD of individual frog songs and frog choruses. Better yet, frog leap over to the Children's Museum of Maine on June 19 at 3:30pm for a special Fabulous Froggies program!

Suzanne Kahn Eder is the Science Coordinator at the Children's Museum of Maine. Before joining the Museum staff in 2001, she worked as a park ranger at Acadia National Park. To access a schedule of the Museum's educational programs, visit www.kitetails.com. To contact Suzanne, email suzannek@kitetails.com.