

CRITTER CORNER

Jeepers Creepers, Listen to Those Peepers—Keuka’s Loud No-See’ums

By the time you read this newsletter, it’ll be time for the Spring din in the ditches along the roads at night. By late March-early April all the peep-peeping, breep-breeping, trilling and shrilling is so loud and insistent one has to roll up their car windows if they want to hold a conversation. What is making the racket? When we were kids, we just called them “peepers.” Come daylight, if you investigate the ditches and ephemeral ponds where the noise was coming from, the critters are nowhere to be seen. Big of voice and little of body, the singers are male toads and frogs, calling to attract mates for breeding.

The peeper-creakers		
	<p>There actually is a spring peeper. At 1½ “ long, it’s the smallest. It has a brown cross on its back, and makes a piping series of high-pitched peep-peep-chirr-peeps. Like the others, it inflates a sac under its chin, expelling air to peep.</p>	
The triller-shrillers		
	<p>At 3”, the American toad is the largest and loudest. It shrieks out a 30 second trill that can be deafening when hundreds are trilling in a pond/ditch.</p>	
The quacker-croakers		
	<p>The masked wood frog is also small at 2” and secretive. A deep-woods frog, its call is a short, repeated quacking-burbling sound.</p>	<p>The four larger frogs (northern leopard, pickerel, green, and bull frogs—all over 2½ “) have shorter, more guttural calls than their smaller cousins. These are frogs of ponds and lakes, they call during the day as well as the night, and they are all visible, making loud yelps as they leap from water’s edge into deeper water when disturbed.</p>
<p>All frogs’ and toads’ eggs are encased in translucent gelatinous blobs floating under the surface in ponds and at lake’s edge. The little black dots in these masses are the eggs, which rapidly turn into gilled tadpoles that wriggle out after a few weeks to eat (mostly decaying vegetation), grow legs, and shrink their tails. Most change into frogs (or toads), shedding their tails and gills by fall. A few—the bullfrog and green frog, may take an additional year to change from tadpole into frog.</p>		