

WHAT'S NEW AT CREW



DEB HANSON

Frogs: The Sounds of Summer

marily by males to attract females in or near wet places so eggs can be laid and fertilized in the water. But calls are also an easy way to identify species of frogs and toads.

Our native green tree frogs give a nasal honk sometimes described as a cow-bell. In a chorus they sound like they are

around the water's edge, under plant leaves, or on blades of sawgrass in the marsh. The bright green of squirrel and green tree frogs is striking. Barking tree frogs have a beautiful green and gray spotted pattern. The gray and brown of tiny oak toads camouflage them well until they hop along the trail. Finding one is a real treat and a reward to the attentive observer.

The 16 species of frogs and toads found in CREW are important indicators of the health of the ecosystem. Because they take in water and air through their skin, they are especially sensitive to pollutants of all kinds. Their dependence on water for reproduction makes them good indicators of changes in wetlands, too. When frog and toad populations show health problems or decline, it's

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calling "hey-babe, hey-babe". Squirrel tree frogs quack like ducks. Narrow-mouthed toads bleat like sheep. Southern cricket frogs sound like marbles clinking together, and barking tree frogs sound like – well, hound dogs barking.

Seeing frogs isn't as easy as hearing them, though. Look



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The bright green color of the green tree frog is striking.

It's summer at CREW. Thunder rumbles in the distance, lightning flashes and rain comes pouring down. As the storm passes, new sounds begin. Is that a sheep bleating? Ducks quacking? Pigs grunting? No, it's a chorus of frogs and toads taking advantage of the rainy season – calling to attract mates, establish territory, or simply to announce the humidity is higher.

An evening walk on any of the CREW trails during the rainy season will reward you with a symphony of frog and toad calls. Calling occurs pri-

a sign that something is wrong. And the loss of frogs means the loss of medicines and pest controls, too.

CREW is part of the SW Florida Amphibian Monitoring Network (www.frogwatch.net), a local group of volunteers who go out once a month during the summer to listen for and record frog and toad species. Started in 2000, the Network's 10-year report shows that SW Florida's frog population is still doing okay, but is losing some species

from the landscape. Development is causing a decline in frog communities here, and exotic frog species (like those big Cuban tree frogs on your lanai) are increasing.

Come take a walk at CREW or step outside your door this summer and listen. You may just hear the sounds of a changing ecosystem. 🌿

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