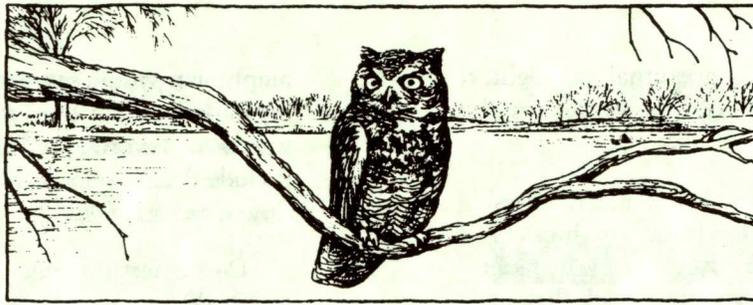


STILLMAN NEWSLETTER



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Tadpoles and Toads

--Mark Spreyer

Imagine if tadpoles never turned into frogs or toads. According to an old African-American folk tale from the deep South, God didn't intend tadpoles to be anything but tadpoles. As the story goes, the Good Lord didn't make just one; he made a whole mess of tadpoles so they would keep each other company. When he was done, there were so many tadpoles you couldn't walk without stepping on 'em. So, to get them out of the way, as much as anything else, the Lord told them to go pull weeds out of the cornfield next to the creek.

The tadpoles went to the field but it was a mighty hot day and they felt very lazy. About this time Old Nick, a trickster, came along and said, "Boys, there's a mighty fine swimmin' hole right down there in the creek." The tadpoles agreed but said, "The Good Lord sent us down here to pull weeds."

Old Nick said they should pull weeds, but they could pull them a whole lot faster if they just cooled off first. No sooner had those tadpoles jumped in the creek then they forgot all about pulling weeds. Every tadpole went swimming and they all had the best time ever.

Meanwhile Old Nick went up by the Lord and remarked, in an offhand way, that some of these new animals the Lord was creating were pretty trifling when it comes to doing what they've been told. When the Good Lord asked him what he's talking about, Old Nick reminded him that those fool tadpoles hadn't

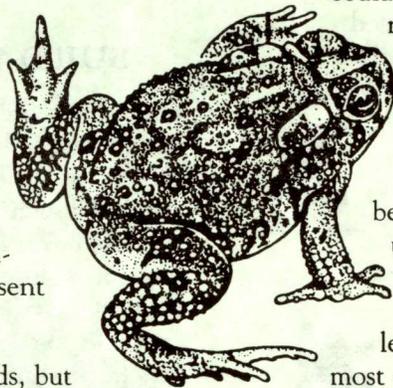
pulled a single weed and the cornfield was terribly overgrown.

God called upon the tadpoles and learned that they had done nothing but swim. The swimming wasn't so bad but he was unhappy that they didn't do what they were told. So, he told them he would cut their tails off because they didn't mind him. The tadpoles cried and begged him not to because then they couldn't swim. But the Good Lord wanted them to remember that there was something else to do in this world besides swimming, so he chopped off their tails, but he gave them some legs so they could swim a little.

All I can say is the Good Lord must have been *really* mad at the toad tadpoles because, unlike the frogs, they didn't even get good swimming legs. With their short hind legs, toads walk or hop, rather than making long leaps, and spend their adult life on land. The most common toad here at Stillman, and in most of N. Illinois, is the American toad (*Bufo americanus*).

This species comes in a variety of colors ranging from tan to reddish brown to gray or olive. Most toads have dark, rounded spots on their backs. Some may also display a light line running down the middle of the back. This cryptic coloration can make them hard to see which is good if they're trying to avoid being eaten, but not so good if they're trying to avoid getting stepped on.

Another reason you might find one between your



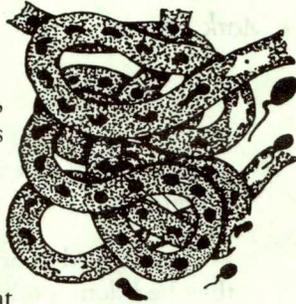
STILLMAN NATURE CENTER

33 WEST PENNY ROAD • SOUTH BARRINGTON • IL • 60010

toes is that toads are primarily nocturnal. At night, they forage for slugs, snails, worms, centipedes, spiders plus many types of insects.

Such a diet makes toads welcome in gardeners' yards. Toads are particularly fond of warm, humid evenings and yard lights, the latter serving as insect attractants. They capture prey with a quick flick of their sticky tongues, using their front feet to push larger meals into their toothless mouths.

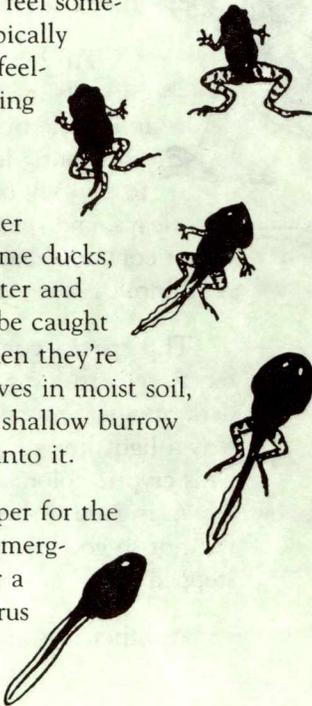
Should a predatory animal try to shove a toad into its mouth, they might well regret it. Besides the warts, one or two per black spot, toads also have large parotoid glands located behind their eyes. When threatened by an enemy, a toad will hunch its body into a rounded form with its nose lowered. This position, combined with the fact that the toad has also inflated its body, makes the toad more difficult to swallow. It also presents the attacker with the parotoid glands.



These oval or kidney-shaped glands produce whitish secretions of steroidal chemicals that can affect blood pressure and heart function and, in general, cause illness to small mammals that attempt to chew on a toad. Now, should you pick up a toad and feel something wet, don't worry. As a toad typically urinates when grabbed, what you're feeling is urine, not poison. Also, handling toads does not cause warts.

Despite their array of chemical defenses, toads are still eaten by other animals including herons, hawks, some ducks, raccoons, skunks and, especially, garter and hognose snakes. Toads are likely to be caught while they are looking for food. When they're not foraging, they will bury themselves in moist soil, leaf litter or under logs. Toads dig a shallow burrow with their hind feet and then back into it.

It is from such burrows, dug deeper for the winter, that the toads will soon be emerging. Shortly thereafter, you will hear a favorite sound of early spring, a chorus of male toads each emitting a pleasing musical trill. Their combined efforts can result in a loud



amphibian symphony. At Stillman, this symphony is regularly heard at the cattail marsh. Such shallow waters are favorite toad breeding grounds. Other sites include ditches, flooded fields, ornamental ponds or slow-moving streams.

During fertilization, the female will lay from 2,000 to 20,000 eggs which are released in two gelatinous strings. These egg strings are often attached to vegetation or submerged branches. In a brief time, from two days to two weeks, thousands of new toad tadpoles will be swimming in the marsh. And, I'm here to say, not one of these tadpoles will ever be seen pulling weeds.

PROGRAMS

PLEASE REMEMBER TO CALL 428-OWLS (6957) AND MAKE RESERVATIONS for programs (except for bird banding open houses). It is very helpful to us if we can anticipate the number of people who are planning to attend our programs. If you discover that you are unable to attend, please call to cancel your reservations. This courtesy will be greatly appreciated.

BUILD YOUR OWN BIRD HOUSE

Many birds, including wrens, swallows and bluebirds, like to nest in tree cavities. You can increase the chances of attracting such birds by placing nest boxes in your yard. Join Jim Kaltsas and Roy Schodtler as they help you assemble your own nest box. Feel free to drop in between the times listed and *please bring your own hammer.*



Date: Sunday, March 22
Time: 1:00 - 3:30
Member's Fee: \$2.00/house kit

SUMMER HOURS BEGIN IN APRIL
In March, Stillman will be open to the public on Sundays from 1 PM to 4 PM. Starting in April, Stillman will be open Sundays from 9AM to 4PM.

BIRD BANDING RETURNS

Watch Mark Spreyer, a licensed bird bander, measure, weigh and record data about our resident and migratory birds. Birds are not caught in a predictable manner, so come prepared to hike the trails. With luck, you'll see a bird in the hand and two in the bush. If it is raining, the banding open house will be cancelled.

Dates: Sundays, April 5 & May 3
Time: 9:00AM to Noon
Fee: None
Non-member's Fee: \$4.00/house kit



MORNING BIRD WALKS

Mark Spreyer will lead a morning bird walk. Migration will be under way and you never know what we might find. Binoculars and field guides are a must. If you don't have any, don't worry, Stillman does. *Please call 428-OWLS to make reservations.*

Date: Saturday, April 18 & Sunday, April 26
Time: 8:00AM
Fee: None
Age: 10 years and up

WILDFLOWER WALKS

Join us as we explore Stillman's woodlands in search of ephemeral beauties such as white trillium, may-apple, Virginia bluebells and the jack-in-the-pulpits. Bring your camera!

Dates: Sundays, May 3 and 10
Time: 2:00PM
Age: Ten years and up
Fee: None



NEW SCHOOL PROGRAM BROCHURE FOR TEACHERS

The Stillman Nature Center is open during the week to school classes. For a brochure that describes the programs and fees, just call or email (stillnc@flash.net) and we'll be happy to send you one.

Also, Stillman welcomes Audubon chapters, garden clubs and other organized adult groups. Call 428-OWLS to reserve a time for your organization.

Enjoy the Earth for Earth Day!

In honor of Earth Day, we will be open on Saturday, April 18, from 8:00AM to 3:00PM

CALLING VOLUNTEERS

Daria Sapp and her indefatigable landscape volunteers *need help*. Duties include buckthorn clearing, prairie burning and wildflower planting.

Stillman has the tools. We need healthy, outdoor-loving bodies to wield them. If you can help, stop by Stillman on any Thursday morning at 9:00AM. Work usually wraps up around noon. Questions? Call Daria at 381-5358.

One touch of nature makes the whole world kin.
--William Shakespeare

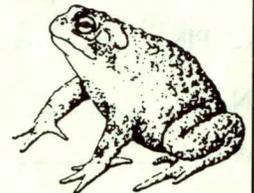
BIRDFOOT'S GRAMPA

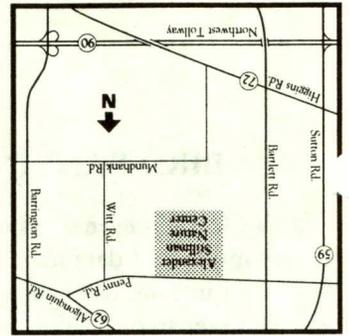
The old man
must have stopped our car
two dozen times to climb out
and gather into his hands
the small toads blinded
by our lights and leaping,
live drops of rain.

The rain was falling,
a mist about his white hair
and I kept saying
you can't save them all,
accept it, get back in
we've got places to go.

But, leathery hands full
of wet brown life,
knee deep in the summer
roadside grass,
he just smiled and said
they have places to go to
too.

--Joseph Bruchac
Entering Onondaga





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 33 West Penny Road

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If you aren't already a member, please consider joining us.

- Yes, I'd like to become a member of the Stillman Nature Center. I enclose my tax deductible contribution of \$_____.
- I'd like to help as a volunteer with programs or land management at the Stillman Nature Center, please call me.
- Please send a gift membership from _____ to the name and address listed below.

Name _____
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