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Frogs and Toads of the Tallgrass Prairie

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Frogs and Toads of the Tallgrass Prairie

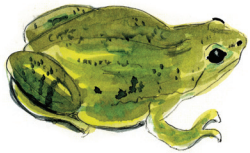
About a hundred species of frogs and toads are found on the North American continent north of Mexico, providing a diversity of seasonal calls that are fascinating to most people but often difficult to sort out.



Note to reader: The author wrote this short article as an introduction to The Frogs and Toads of North America by Lang Elliott, Carl Gerhardt, and Carlos Davidson published by Houghton Mifflin Company, Boston, in March 2009. It is reproduced here with permission.



Narrowmouth Toad



Blanchard's Cricket Frog



Boreal Chorus Frog



Leopard Frog

*Illustrations by Elaine Shea Jones
Based on photos by Suzanne L. Collins, CNAH*

[The authors] have addressed this situation in an exemplary fashion, with excellent recordings and exquisite photography accompanied by an informative and organized text, all bundled together . . . that will provide hours of enjoyment for people who like to spend their time outdoors.

Much of that time will be spent listening on humid nights, when male frogs and toads are active and calling

in the relentless search for mates that ensures the continued existence of their kind. The very best time to encounter these amphibians is shortly after a rainstorm, when the wind and noise have relented and the ground is covered with vernal pools. At that time, anurans* come into full symphony and provide an enlightening view of their abundance. Many of us have had the experience of discovering the occasional toad sitting



Great Plains Toad

patiently beneath a street lamp, as it waits to snack on a fallen insect, or we have been startled by the leap of a sleek frog along the edges of a pond as it sought escape into deeper waters.

But few of us can appreciate the full-blown cacophony of a mixed chorus of anurans on a spring night in eastern North America, the bleating song of Great Plains Narrowmouth Toads across the central grasslands of our continent, or the raucous din of Spadefoots after a flash flood on our southwestern deserts. Folks who get to hear such noises are

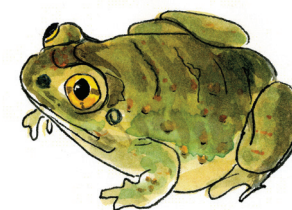
often stunned by the intensity of these little animals, but they shouldn't be — after all, it's about sex, and anything having to do with matters of the heart can be pretty compelling, even for a frog or toad.

In July 2003, Lang Elliott came to visit me and my wife, Suzanne, primarily so he could view and borrow some of Suzanne's amphibian images to use in this book. We were impressed by his intensity as he talked about frogs and toads and by his vision for a book about them. To be sure, Lang appreciated

them, their beauty, and their unique position in the animal kingdom — wee vertebrates always conducting a balancing act with one foot on land and the other in water. But he was also keenly aware of their precarious place in the world, a world where water is now a precious commodity and where many folks are less and less willing to share it with the smaller creatures of the earth, or even to keep it clean for them. One

still do not understand that we drink and share and swim in the same water as frogs and toads.

Maybe this book will change that. Maybe. But certainly it will help us to monitor the noisy little amphibians that share our water. It's important that frogs and toads stay noisy. The alternative would be unbearable — a silence that would mean the water was gone . . . or undrinkable.



Plains Spadefoot

evening, he and Suzanne and I mused about this, about the prediction of Rachel Carson in her profound book *Silent Spring*, about the bleak future for amphibians. It was not an uplifting discussion; we concluded that people

* any of the order (*Anura*) of amphibians comprising the frogs and toads all of which lack a tail in the adult stage and have long strong hind limbs suited to leaping and swimming (Webster's Dictionary)

Joseph T. Collins is a prolific author about Kansas wildlife with titles covering amphibians, reptiles, fishes, and turtles. He co-authored the Peterson Field Guide to Reptiles and Amphibians of Eastern and Central North America. After a distinguished career in the University of Kansas Natural History Museum for 30 years, he continues to serve as an expert to various regional institutions.