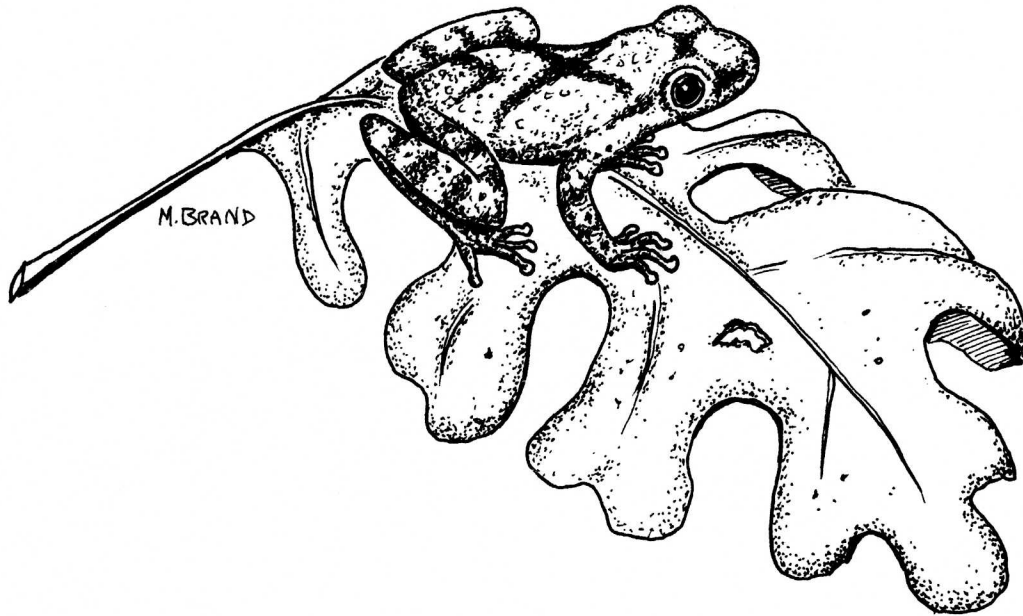


Naturalist Notebook

RIVER BEND NATURE CENTER

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Spring Peeper - *Pseudacris crucifer*

A sure sign that spring has returned is the sound of frogs calling in the ponds. One of the first frogs to start calling, and therefore mating, in spring is the spring peeper. The spring peeper is a small frog, measuring about $\frac{3}{4}$ to $1\frac{1}{4}$ inches (1.9 -3.2 cm) in length. It is light to dark brown and grey in color. It has a distinctive grey X on its back and its scientific species name – *crucifer*- comes from the Latin for “cross bearer.” The small toe pads on the frogs’ feet indicate that it is a tree frog. The spring peeper is found throughout eastern United States and Canada, east of the Great Plains and south of James Bay. In Minnesota, it is found in the non-prairie counties. To survive, the spring peeper needs both woodlands and wetlands in its habitat.

In winter, the spring peeper will hibernate on land under the leaf litter in the forest. Like most frogs, it allows its body to become partially frozen. By early April, after the wood frogs have begun their mating season, the males will emerge and move to the wetlands where they will begin calling for mates. It is from

this call that they receive their common name of peepers. A single peeper peeping sounds like a high pitched peep, but a whole chorus of male peepers will sound like many sleigh bells. Only the males call and they will call an average of 4500 times a night. The females then locate the males for breeding. The eggs are laid and fertilized while attached to underwater plants. The breeding season will last until June, although the mating call can be heard much later, sometimes until November. Tadpoles take 12-14 weeks to transform after hatching. Spring peepers feed on small insects and other invertebrates.

Some older guides may have the scientific name for the spring peeper listed as *Hyla crucifer*. Until 1986 the spring peeper was in the genus *Hyla*. Scientists determined that it has more in common with the chorus frogs of the genus *Pseudacris*.