



Mud Creek Conservancy
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The Tributary

Newsletter of the Mud Creek Conservancy

Spring 2011

Spring Harbingers

By Rick Marrs

As Old Man Winter finally loosens his seemingly relentless grip and the first warm rain falls upon the fields and woods of the Mud Creek valley, harbingers of Spring make their presence known with voices raised in song. No, I'm not talking about birds. Now that the robins have started over-wintering in increasing numbers for the past few decades, the amphibian clan may now be considered the true Spring Heralds. Of course I'm speaking of frogs.



Late Winter rains and temperatures above 50°F induce the tiny frogs of the genus *Pseudacris* to leave their winter quarters beneath layers of leaves and mud and begin seeking mates. The painting (above) shows a Chorus frog (*Pseudacris triserata*). Chorus frogs are less than one inch from nose to rump and are usually gray with three irregular stripes down their backs.

The males call from the concealment of clumps of grasses and partially submerged vegetation. Their calls sound like someone drawing his thumb across a hard plastic comb. When a male's vocalizations attract a potential mate, he grasps her around the waist and rides her piggy-back. **(Continued on next page)**

Spring Harbingers

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This is known as “amplexus”. The female deposits her jelly encased eggs in strands and clumps among submerged plant stems as the male mate externally fertilizes them as they emerge. About 12 days later the eggs hatch and the tadpoles feed upon algae and microscopic plant and animal matter until they “morph” into tiny froglets. Adult size is more or less attained before Autumn ends.

Spring Peepers (*Pseudacris crucifer*) are slightly larger than chorus frogs and they spend more time in trees and shrubs. Like their close relatives, the treefrogs, peepers have suction cup-like pads on the tips of their toes to aid in climbing.

During the breeding season the genders of peepers are fairly easy to determine. Males are usually dark grayish-brown and the larger females have a slightly pinkish-orange color. During the rest of the year both sexes are light brown and have a conspicuous “X” on their backs, thus earning the species name “crucifer”.

As their name implies, peepers’ calls are high-pitched “peeps”. Much louder than anything that should be uttered by such a minute creature, a full blown chorus of hundreds of individuals can be deafening at close range. Once a mating pair is established, amplexus and egg-laying is similar to that of chorus frogs.

A third kind of frog to breed before Spring officially begins is the Southern Leopard Frog. It is a medium-sized frog about 3-4 inches from nose to rump and is green with large dark spots on its back. The call of this species has been compared to the chuckling laughter of a homicidal maniac. I think it sounds like a duck with severe intestinal distress.

Regardless of a human’s interpretation, the lady leopard frogs find it irresistible, and soon comes running (or hopping). Once united in amplexus, the pair deposit 500 or so eggs encased in jelly-like masses among vegetation in the shallows. The eggs hatch in 10 days and by mid-June little froglets emerge from the water, ready to gobble up invertebrate along the banks and in nearby meadows.

So in those first warm rainy days in February and March, listen carefully. You just might hear your amphibious neighbors proclaiming, “Spring is on its way!”

Events Calendar



The Sargent Road Association is hosting their annual meeting at 7:30 PM on Monday, April 11th. The meeting will take place at the Mud Creek Barn, located at the corner of Mud Creek Road and 86th Street. The meeting is open to the public and the Sargent Road Association invites and encourages all neighborhood residents to attend.

Special guest Indianapolis Police Chief Paul Ciesielski will be speaking on neighborhood safety and crime watch issues. Additionally, Jodie Ellis, exotic insects education coordinator from Purdue University will present information on combating the Emerald Ash Borer, an invasive pest that is decimating the Ash tree population throughout the Midwest.



Scouts remove bags filled with harvested Garlic Mustard from MCC's 86th Street Nature Preserve

MCC Invasives Removal Day & SRA Litter Pickup

Join MCC and SRA on Saturday, April 16th for our annual neighborhood beautification day. SRA will host a litter pickup on designated neighborhood streets.

MCC volunteers will focus on removing invasive garlic mustard and bush honeysuckle from MCC's properties. Volunteers should bring work gloves and suitable footwear and meet at the Mud Creek Barn at 9:00 AM. Refreshments will be served.

Earth Day Indiana



Round up the family and plan to visit MCC's booth on Earth Day this year. Rick Marrs will have his traveling collection of turtles, snakes, and assorted reptiles on display. Earth Day takes place on Saturday, April 23rd, at White River State Park, 801 W. Washington Street. The festival runs from 11AM to 4PM and features plenty of hands-on and educational activities for children, teens, and adults.

JF New's Native Species Selection Tool

While MCC and other organizations devote plenty of time and effort to removing invasive species such as garlic mustard and bush honeysuckle from their properties, often times landscapers inadvertently introduce other non-native species to our neighborhoods.

With Spring right around the corner, local nurseries and home improvement stores are stocking up on trees, shrubs, and other plants to entice do-it-yourself landscapers into shopping. Nothing prohibits nurseries from selling non-native plants, resulting in the proliferation of opportunistic species that often crowd out more fragile natives and spread rapidly due to a lack of natural barriers.

Property owners might want to spend a few minutes drawing up a list of native trees and shrubs before heading to the nursery. A new internet-based tool introduced by JF New makes the task of plant, grass, and tree selection much easier.

Users can enter data such as their geographic location, solar exposure, soil type, and soil pH into a form. The application then creates an extensive list of suitable vegetation for that particular site, along with each plant's scientific name and a photo. JF New has made the application available to the public free of charge. Click on the following link to try it out: <http://nativespec.com/nativebrowser/>

Mud Creek Meadow: A Natural Corridor for Bees & Butterflies

By Dr. Jackie Morice

If you haven't noticed Mud Creek Conservancy's Mud Creek Meadow at 75th St and Sargent Road, the butterflies and bees certainly have! In meeting the mission of Mud Creek Conservancy by promoting biodiversity, filtering storm water and reducing our carbon footprint, Mud Creek Meadow, a roadside planting using prairie plants, is already becoming a popular site for them!

Restoring roadsides to native prairies can benefit wildlife by adding habitat and restoring connectivity



Zebra Swallowtail (*Eurytides protesilaus*)

between fragmented reserves. In Iowa, which has over a 20 year history of roadside planting, research shows management of roadsides profoundly affects the butterfly community.

Species richness of habitat-

sensitive butterflies showed a two-fold increase in roadside prairies as compared with grassy and weedy roadsides. Tracking studies showed butterflies were less likely to exit prairie roadsides, indicating their mortality rates by traffic may be lower and offering preliminary evidence roadsides have the potential to be used as corridors or “stepping stones” between habitat “islands”. This is being suggested for bee populations as well.

The plants in the meadow benefit, too! For pollination, some native species require a specific insect or skipper butterfly species found in roadside corridors.