Frogs and Toads of the Tallgrass Prairie

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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.

[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

*anurans: a class of amphibians that includes frogs and toads.
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 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 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.

* 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.