

[From Fall 2000]

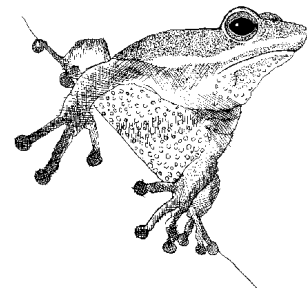
Nature's Colorful Magnets

They look like magnets of assorted sizes stuck to the door. Their shiny green skin is smooth as plastic, and because they lie very still, it is easy to mistake the green tree frogs (*Hyla cinerea*) suctioned to the back door of the office for refrigerator magnets. These "magnets", however, are real and very much alive.

A colorful little frog, the green tree frog is a member of the Hylidae family, a group of more than 600 known species found in the temperate and tropic areas of all continents except Australia and Antarctica. This group of tiny frogs, which also includes the Spring Peeper, prefers walking and climbing to hopping, but can jump up to ten feet if necessary. They have tiny suction cup-like pads on each toe that help them with their climbing. Each toe also has extra cartilage that enables them to move their toes around while the suction pad stays flat against the climbing surface.

Residents of eastern Virginia, green tree frogs live in swamps and along the edges of lakes, ponds and streams. They reach 1 to 2 inches in length, and although usually bright green, they have an amazing ability to change color, darkening to brown or lightening to pale greenish yellow. A distinct yellow line running from their upper lip down along the sides is typical as well as the yellow spots on their back. During the day, green tree frogs rest, well camouflaged, among the green plants of their watery home. At night, they become active searching for insects to eat, especially flies. Their hunt for food often brings them to buildings and other structures where bright lights attract the insects they seek.

During breeding season, the males gather in choruses numbering in the thousands, calling their nasal, cowbell-like "queenk" as often as 75 times a minute. It is a familiar summer evening sound. Some of the males however, remain silent, content to let others do the work while they reap the reward. They congregate close to the frog chorus and take advantage of the callers' efforts by intercepting the females attracted by the calls. Breeding season lasts from spring until late summer and fall in the southern portions of their range. The tadpoles are entirely aquatic, and are also green with a white or yellow stripe along the side of the head from eye to snout, similar to the adults. In thirty to sixty days, when the tadpoles have completed their transformations to froglets, another group of green tree frogs is ready to begin their own magnet impression -- maybe even on your back door.



Nancy Biegel, ESVNWR Recreation Assistant