



MONTEREY NEWS

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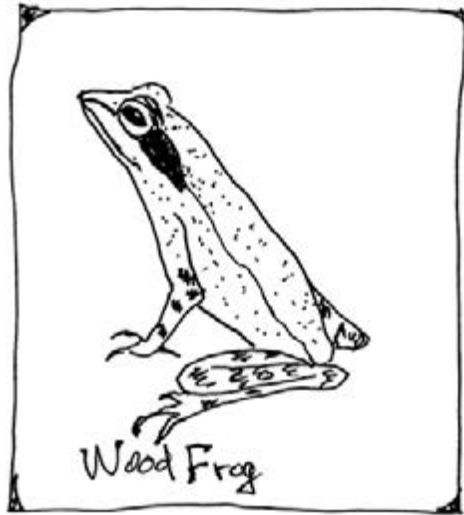
Frogster Eggs Due to Hatch

We have a clutch of eggs due to pop right on Easter. Maybe the fact that they are under some ice will set them back, or maybe protect them in ways they count on. If they hatch under the ice, the varmints will be kept out for a while including us and our dog who like to mess with that pond on warmer days.

This is not a true vernal pool, rather an old stock tank sunk in the ground in our garden, kept topped up by us during the summer so we have someplace to rinse off the carrots, also visit the frogs that keep coming back to it over the years. This year the ice was off the pool in the middle of March and for the first time this spring there was a splash as some creature headed for safety down under.

This was a wood frog, and though I never saw her, she left her calling card in a sparkling cluster of eggs. Each one is a black bead set in the center of a small clear marble of gelatin. If you were to pick up this mass, which is about the size of a softball, each egg would be an individual package in its own clear ball. The mass is usually attached to an underwater anchor, a stick or some leaves.

After a while, the little black bead starts to look lumpy. Then it will even move a bit, and finally after about two weeks' gestation, out comes a tiny black pollywog. Because this is an isolated pool, fish have never yet shown up here. We have had salamander eggs sometimes, over the years, but so far this year the wood frogs have it all to themselves. As they get a little older, they will wiggle up to the surface, and then race away deep if a moving shadow comes over them, or if a critter of any kind is discernable, up in the terrestrial world. Down go the pol-



lywogs, to vanish under the old leaves at the bottom. There are rocks down there, too, provided as a further safe hideout for temporary residents.

By mid-July the pollywogs will have resorbed their tails and sprouted legs. Further magic occurs internally so they can enter their second life. They move from aquatic to terrestrial homes. These are the two "sides of life" of the amphibian. As pollywogs they have gills, but as wood frogs they now have lungs.

New terrestrial wood froglets are only about half an inch long. They head for the woods and get under cover. They don't reach their full size for another year or so when they are about two inches long. These frogs are handsome, tan with black masks and creamy underparts. They spend their adult lives in the woods, invisible thanks to their outfits, but come back to natal pools for mating. At this time, they do a lot of singing which sounds just like quacking ducks. Hikers may get out their binoculars and creep up on a woodland pond hoping to see a flock of ducks. The closer they get,

the more the ducks quiet down. No flock of birds erupts from the surface. All is silent.

The wood frogs have interrupted their mating chorus and slid down out of sight. They can take a peek up, eyes and nose only, get more air and ease under again. "Dive, dive!" whispers their inner commando.

This is spring in the woods, new life, with age-old systems and strategies for success. If we are so lucky, all we have to do is hold still and listen.

— Bonner McAllester