

PROBABLE CASE OF DEATH-FEIGNING BY WOOD FROG

ROBERT KREBA, #4-2805 Parliament Avenue, Regina, Saskatchewan S4R 2L1

While exploring a wooded swamp-like area in the back slope zone of the sand dunes at Good Spirit Lake Provincial Park (1400, May 21, 1977), I encountered several wood frogs, *Rana sylvatica*. I collected one specimen, intending to photograph and later release it. It was put in a ventilated jar with just enough water to keep it moist.

About an hour later, I looked at the frog and was surprised to see that it appeared dead. I removed it from the jar and examined it briefly. The legs were limp, outstretched away from the body, eyes half-closed, and no breathing could be discerned. I held it loosely for about two minutes, and it did not stir or attempt to escape; when captured it had seemed vigorous and healthy. It showed no sign of emaciation or disease, yet was, inexplicably, apparently dead. It was about 35 mm in body length, and of undetermined sex.

I decided to at least return the dead amphibian to its natural habitat, and walked a short distance to a small slough, also in the wooded area. I tossed in the "corpse", and to my surprise it immediately swam away.

There have been previous reports

of death-feigning amphibians both involving the Canadian Toad, *Bufo hemiophrys*^{1 2}. Although this behaviour has also been recorded for several other amphibian species, has not, to my knowledge, been previously recorded for *R. sylvatica*.

It is generally accepted that death feigning is employed as a predator escape device. McNicholl¹ cites observations concerning the unwillingness of tiger salamanders, *Ambystoma tigrinum*, to take unmoving food or prey, which at times includes frog and toads. My own observations over the years, with captive tiger salamanders, and several species of native snakes, as well as exotic snake agree with his observations. It would seem that many amphibians and reptiles are incapable of recognizing an organism as potential prey unless it moves. Death-feigning in the wood frog would appear to be of definite advantage as protection against animal as well as human predators.

¹McNICHOLL, M. K. 1972. An observation of Apparent Death-feigning by a Toad. *Blue Jay* 30:54-55.

²NERO, R. W. 1967. A Possible Record of Death-feigning in a Toad. *Blue Jay* 25:193-194.



Wood Frog

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