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by Hope Sawyer Buyukmihci

One April morning Ed Abbott, a photographer, and I were in the refuge yard when we heard a loud call. "A red-bellied woodpecker," I remarked.

Soon the call came again, and we both tried to see the caller. But the brilliant red head and long form of the woodpecker were nowhere in evidence. "He sounds awfully low down," said Ed. "Maybe he's searching for nesting materials." We began to look among piles of rocks and brush. Still, we couldn't see him.

The voice came again, and I realized that it was made by no bird. It came from inside a rusty pipe only two feet from me. Ed shined a flashlight into the open end of the pipe and saw the small creature with the big voice. It was a tree toad, *Hyla versicolor*, closely related to the spring peeper, but larger, being about two inches long.

This toad, who spends summers in the treetops searching for insects, is famous for changing color to match his surroundings. He can change from gray to brown to green in about an hour. Our small fellow was dark gray as he emerged from the depths of the rain-wet pipe, but he had bright yellow-orange markings on the underside of his hind legs. We placed him on a patch of sunlit moss, where he stayed, blinking his black eyes, as Ed took a few photographs.

The tree toad has finely pimpled skin with indistinct markings, and has long toes ending in sticky discs which enable him to climb trees and maneuver among high branches. I have seen a tree toad look out of a birdhouse on cloudy days, slowly withdrawing himself as I passed by.

A Mysterious Voice

It came from inside a rusty pipe.
It was a tree toad.



In spring the male tree toad precedes the female to a shallow, plant-grown, quiet pond and sings either at night or on cloudy or rainy days. Eggs are brown and yellow, laid free or attached, or at the water's surface in films of 4-40. One individual may lay up to 2,000 eggs. The eggs hatch in four or five days into 1/4-inch tadpoles with reddish-orange tails and creamy bellies. In about two months they have grown to be two inches long. While small, these tadpoles feed on ooze in the pond, but later they catch insects by a speedy dart of their tongues.

The particular toad we found that April day was in a pipe at the very spot where years before a

wooden door to a dogpen had sheltered one of his kind pressed between the door and the jamb against which it closed. When I first saw this toad I thought a closing door had squashed him, but it was not so. These animals are able to squeeze themselves into unbelievably small places without apparent harm.

Hearing for the first time the call of the tree toad, so much like that of a bird with whom I am familiar, reminded me of how little I know after a lifetime of observing nature. How many times they have called and I had not heard them. How many hundreds patrol the treetops all around me, and I am not aware.