

Chorus Frogs

By Gloria Hildebrandt

A couple of years ago I attended a workshop about managing ponds and wetlands, given by Credit Valley Conservation (CVC), my local authority. They handed out a list of frogs we might have on our properties: Leopard, Wood, Spring Peeper, Green, Tree.

“What about Chorus Frogs?” I asked. “Why aren’t they on the list?” The presenters quickly glanced at each other with wide eyes.

“Do you think you have Chorus Frogs?” one asked.

“Yes, in my swamp.”

“They’re a species of concern, so if you have them we’d like to come out and hear them.”

So last spring when the Spring Peepers and Chorus Frogs started calling, I recorded them with my cellphone video. I contacted CVC and soon an ecologist emailed me that she’d like to visit my property. That same afternoon two young women drove up in a CVC vehicle. One explained that Spring Peepers are sometimes mistaken for Chorus Frogs as they make a similar extended croak. I didn’t know this and felt embarrassed.

“Maybe I don’t have Chorus Frogs after all,” I said. “But let’s go see.”

Silent Frogs

We went to the edge of the swamp where I had recorded the video. Wouldn’t you know it, all the frogs were completely silent. No frog of any kind made any sound whatsoever. The CVC staff member got out her phone. “Let’s play a recording and see if they

respond.” She did; they didn’t.

I was encouraged to play my recording. The young women listened but weren’t certain they heard Chorus Frogs. And no frog responded.

“This swamp is perfect for them,” one said. “It’s shallow.” They went on to explain that Chorus Frogs are extremely vulnerable, and that they might be present at one time and then disappear. Droughts can kill them. Late frosts after they have laid eggs can prevent young from hatching. They can very easily die out from a particular location. I didn’t know this, having assumed that if I once had them, I would always have them in the swamp.

Disappointed, I asked if they wanted to walk back by way of the pond. They did, and were nicely complimentary, saying it’s a beautiful property, I’m so lucky, they would love to have a property like this. The woman lives in Mississauga.

As we poked around the pond, back at the swamp, the frogs started calling again – naturally while we weren’t there. One woman asked the other “Do you hear a Chorus Frog?” “I think I do,” said the other.

We returned to their car where the first woman asked “Would you confirm it?”

“I would,” the other said decisively. I asked what would happen next.

“If you like, you can report it to the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry, but you don’t have to.”

“Why wouldn’t I want to?” I asked. I was told that



▲ Spring Peeper.
PHOTO BY DAWN RENFREW.



◀ Western Chorus Frog.
PHOTO BY BENNY MAZUR,
COURTESY WIKIPEDIA.

some people don’t like to do anything official about their land. But if Chorus Frogs are in danger, and their habitats could be protected, I want to help, and said so.

Help For Frogs

They emailed me exactly where to go online to make the report. On the website, there was a lot of technical information I couldn’t provide, but in the comments section I wrote that I have a video recording of the calls. I got an email from the Ministry asking for a copy of the recording and I replied that I had posted it on the

magazine’s Facebook page. I got a further email stating “We can hear both Western Chorus Frog and Spring Peeper in the video recording.”

I forwarded this message to the CVC person who was happy to learn this and offered to provide technical coordinates for the observation location. So the Ministry person was pleased to get this.

Now it’s confirmed by a couple of official organizations that my swamp has Chorus Frogs, a species of special concern.

I think my father would be pleased.