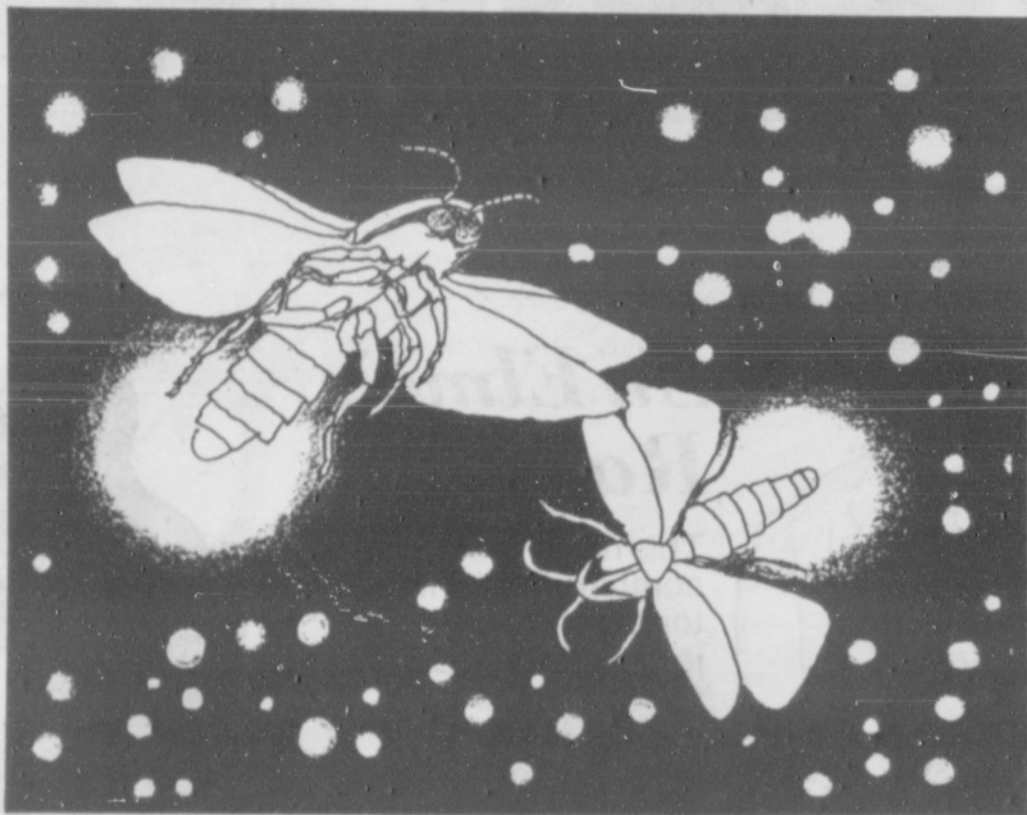




The Flash of the Firefly

There are many natural wonders in the Pacific Northwest, but one we miss is the flash of the firefly on a summer evening.

Actually a kind of beetle, each of the 2,000 species of fireflies has a specific flash pattern. Most fireflies are rovers. The male flies around randomly, flashing his signal to attract the attention of a female. Keeping near the ground, the female responds to the male's flash with her own signal, guiding him to her.

The competition among males is keen. Often the male-to-female ratio is fifty to one. It might take a week for a male to find a mate. But for the female, mating can be completed within six minutes after leaving her burrow in the ground.

Synchronous (SING-kruh-nus) fireflies inhabit a large area of the Tropic Zone stretching from India

By Paul Gerhards

through Southeast Asia to New Guinea. In early evening males swarm in trees, one to a leaf, in clusters. In the center of each cluster is a female on her own leaf. At first the males flash at random, but they soon synchronize, accurate to within twenty milliseconds.

Scientists believe that it is not the synchronous flashing but the intensity or brightness of an individual's flash that attracts the female. A female can judge the brightness of one flash against another only if they occur at the same time. This being so, a cheater has no way of proving his flash is brighter. He is automatically out of the competition. And there is no way the genes that directed him to flash out of synchrony in the first place can be passed on.

YA

The Gray Tree Frog

By Andrew Cobb

While picking a fresh ear of corn from my garden last summer, I spotted something unusual. I bent closer to the object and noticed that it was breathing. Ah, it must be a toad. Wait a minute. Why was a toad on my corn stalk? Getting more suspicious, I got down on my hands and knees and peered at it nose to nose. I was curious about that creature, but it didn't seem to care the least little bit about me.

The creature in question was a gray tree frog (*Hyla versicolor*). It is in the Hylidae family, as is the more often heard than seen spring peeper (*Hyla crucifer*). The gray or common tree frog in my garden just happened to be a bright green color. Gray or green is common, but *Hyla versicolor* may be any color from brown to white, depending on its surroundings.

The adults are about the size of a book of matches and have warty



looking skin similar to the American toad (*Bufo americanus*). Close observation will reveal a white spot under the frog's eye.

While waiting for insects to pass, the tree frog clings to branches with the fine, suction-like discs on its webbed feet. If you look closely you will see an intercalary bone on each foot. This gives the foot a step-like appearance. On the rear of the thigh is an area of yellow or orange which is hidden while the frog is resting.

The gray tree frog is found in swampy areas, gardens or moist woodlands. Look carefully, because the gray tree frog is cleverly camouflaged and will not move even the slightest when you approach.

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