



A remarkable event takes place this month as frogs return to breeding ponds to spawn. Typically, frogs breed in late winter, sometimes even as early as January. Male frogs arrive at favourite mating sites first and start to call, usually after dark. At the height of the hotbed of commotion, males will croak persistently during daylight hours too. Inflating a highly elastic vocal sac, forcing air over the vocal chords, produces the croak or call. It is a low-pitched sound, smooth and repetitive, similar to a monotonous, mechanical churr. It is used to attract females and a more powerful croak indicates a larger, healthier and therefore more attractive male.

During copulation the male frog grips the female behind her forelegs in a firm hug or hold known as an amplexus. The male develops thickened nuptial pads on his thumbs at this time of year to strengthen his grasp. This hugging closeness of the male and female during amplexus increases the chances of successful fertilisation. A female can lay up to 3,000 eggs in one night. As she releases her eggs the male instantly fertilises them by drenching them externally with his sperm. As the sperm coating of the eggs consumes water, it expands into a protective jelly, resulting in the familiar clumps of spawn.

As soon as spawning is finished, adult frogs quickly disperse, giving rise to their scientific name *temporaria*. The eggs hatch within two weeks as tadpoles. Research has shown that on average only five eggs from one clump of spawn will reach maturity. Predators of tadpoles include fish, newts, dragonfly larvae, water boatman and water beetle larvae.

Froglets leave the breeding pond in high summer, usually around July or August. Often emerging in rain and in large numbers. The tiny froglets are a welcome sight for yet another cohort of hungry predators including grass snake, heron, common buzzard, fox or badger.

314 words

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