

Jan 80

NEW SPECIES DISCOVERED ON RED CREEK

The annual Labor Day weekend on Red Creek, near Wiggins, Mississippi, is well known among Sierra Club members as a time of relaxation and good clean fun. Less well known are the scientific studies and dedicated research made during that trip.

Soon to be published in the Florida Parishes Journal of Phrenology and Cuisinart Maintenance (the most respected scientific publication of the delta region) is a report of the remarkable findings made September 1-3, 1979, on Red Creek. The article, prepared by the interdisciplinary team of Jan Gregory, Cornell Tramontana, Gordon and Josie Patton, Mary Ann Stevens, Brad Smith, et al., describes the behavior of Rana Hirsutus Major, The Great Hairy Frog. The existence of Rana H. was postulated as early as May 1977 when an amphibious animal emerged from Red Creek during the canoeists' lunch break. Snatching a slice of pumpernickel and some of Pete Van Duym's kippered snacks, the creature paused only briefly to slap a dab of Dijon mustard on the bread before disappearing into the woods. It was impossible to identify the lunch thief as a Great Hairy Frog positively because its physiognomy was obscured by dark glasses. Tufts of hair falling over the glasses and the general appearance of a beast not unlike Kermit of the Muppets heightened the curiosity of the Sierrans.

It was not, however, until September 1979 that a Great Hairy Frog was actually captured. As studies later showed, Rana H. has delicate hearing; being near camp and having its aural faculties subjected to a discussion between Cornell Tramantana and Gordon Patton rendered the frog too sick to move. The ill creature was revived by a solution of Geritol and Perrier, with a twist.

Thorough taxonomic analysis permitted the differentiation of The Great Hairy Frog from a sub-species, The Lesser Hairy Frog, Rana Hirsutus Minor. The differentiation is made by the latter's eschewing of sideburns. Correspondence with international researchers suggests a relation between the Red Creek discovery and the Eastern European Hairy Frog, found chiefly on the beaches of Poland, the Ukraine, and Sicily. The Eastern European Hairy Frog is distinguished by the abundant hair in the armpits of the females.

The Great Hairy Frogs are social animals, much like bees and ants. Leaders of the group are elected. The election is preceded by a fascinating ritual in which those frogs seeking to be elected hop through a pasture and exert enormous amounts of energy filling the air with bits of bovine excreta.

The researchers discovered marked differences in mental capacity among the frogs. Those whose skin was mottled olive-green and blue were more alert and quicker to learn than the group as a whole. On the other hand, the frogs with purple and gold colorings could be taught virtually nothing and, in fact, depended on the olive-green and blue frogs for their well-being. The researchers were unable to determine what, if any, function the purple and gold frogs played in the social organization of the species.

One post-pubescent alpha male was observed as he performed a long ritualistic preparation for mating. The beast stood in front of a mirror, combing its hair for 2 hours, 27.674 minutes, while wearing black bikini undershorts and listening to throbbing music. The researcher was unable to see the complete ritual because the frog donned a white leisure suit and drove into downtown Wiggins. (This observation was made on Saturday night, September 2.)

Efforts to develop a commercial value of the Great Hairy Frog have been frustrating. It is the larger, more muscular legs of the males that are sought by restaurants, but only the females could be taught to use depilatories. The market for hairy frog legs has yet to be developed.

Studies on the Great Hairy Frog will resume on the Memorial Day Weekend Red Creek canoe trip. Further studies will, of course, be reported in the Delta Sierran. Meanwhile, initial research is being done on another Red Creek discovery. It is Triturus Gordonensis, or Gordon's Newt, so called because it was discovered by Gordon Patton during a particularly ambitious attempt at wilderness gourmet cooking and because the parti-colored pattern of its back is identical to the tartan plaid of the Gordon Highlanders. This variegated appearance has led the research team to believe that Gordon's newt is distantly related to the Checkered Crab -- not to be confused with the Yellow Crab or the White Fleet Crab.

Surely there are more Delta Sierrans of a scientific bent. Send in your scholarly articles to this journal. Fred Barry, birding columnist for the Times-Picayune, will soon be reporting here the sighting of the Great Speckled Bird in the rafters of the Grand Ol' Opry in Nashville, Tennessee. Don't miss it.