
Critters

By Bob Loomis

One of my greatest pleasures is sitting out on my deck in the early morning, reading the paper, having my first cup of coffee, and listening to the various critters that share our lake and its environs. The lake and surrounding land provide several ecosystems where a host of animals can live. We can see some, but many are only evident by their sounds.

The deep chug-o-rums of the bullfrogs, which can reach a foot or more in length, are comforting sounds from my youth in rural New Jersey. Another lake resident is the half-inch-long southern cricket frogs that live in the marshy area below the spillway. Just stand there awhile and listen: you'll first hear one or two tentative notes, which soon turn into a chorus of raspy clicks sounding something like those little metal party clickers. It's amazing how such a big sound can come from such a small source—a source we'll likely never see.

My wife and I have mentioned now and again how much fun it would be to sleep out on our deck sometime and enjoy the sounds of our wild neighbors (no, not Leslie, Blair, or Kathy!). Anyway, one night we moved to

the basement apartment which has a ground level window, opened the window wide, and went to bed. The night was alive with sound—crickets, katydids, frogs, toads, and who knows what else. We were still awake at midnight.

About that time, a family of barred owls began hooting outside our window, and a raccoon came by making its distinctive trilling call. It almost seemed that the owls and raccoon were now sitting outside our window looking in. At that point, we decided enough was enough, closed the window, and finally got to sleep.

We all have wild neighbors we do not know, and getting to know them better is part of the satisfaction of living near our lake.

Bob Loomis is a retired forest plant pathologist and entomologist for the U.S. Forest Service. During his career, he studied how air pollution affects forest vegetation. He is now president of Lake Ellen Homeowners Association as well as an avid tennis player. In his spare time, he enjoys playing the accordion and brewing beer. Bob and his wife, Ann, live in Chapel Hill, NC. You may contact Bob at abloomis@bellsouth.net.



Photo by Tad Lemery