

BY MARK W. MOFFETT

I've been crazy about frogs since I was a kid. I collected them along with snakes, ants, and other critters, and even joined the Wisconsin Herpetological Society as a charter member—at age 14. Now, as a zoologist-photographer, I get to combine my two great passions. For a guy like me, an assignment to cover Brazil's Atlantic forest was a ticket to . . .

Frog heaven

By a stream on the island of São Sebastião, a frog's fevered leap made me the key prop in an amphibian romance. I didn't see it coming, though. For hours I'd been crouching in the cold, rushing water to capture the foot-flagging mating dance of a male *Hylodes asper*. Swarms of the island's infamous blackflies, called *borrachudos*, bored into me as the frog whistled his mating call and danced his heart out. When a female showed up, I suddenly found myself in the middle of the drama. Oblivious to anything but the urge to get closer to the male, his future mate hopped onto my leg as if it were a rock (below). I focused on my business, the frogs on theirs, and soon the passionate pair jumped into the water to find some privacy in the stony streambed.

When I was growing up, I dreamed of having the kind



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The illusion of a rival puts a poisonous pumpkin toadlet (*Brachycephalus* sp.) on the attack—against himself. "Finding this gem of an animal is magical," says Brazilian zoologist Célio Haddad, who holds the mirror.



of grand adventure that would put me on intimate terms with nature. The exploits of naturalists like William Beebe and Charles Darwin filled my childhood fantasies. Now, I am following in their footsteps.

Like them, I face more than a few challenges. Secretive behavior makes some frogs tough to find. The world's smallest frog, *Brachycephalus didactylus*, hides in debris on the forest floor. For two days three Brazilian frog experts helped me sift through leaf litter to look for a flash of brown the size of a fingernail. As we were about to give up, we found one—just one—which I photographed on the cheek of a colleague (page 2). *Xenohyla truncata*, the only frog in the world known to eat fruit, was hard to catch and even harder to catch feeding. I watched one for two days straight, but it ate nothing.

I began this trip with a list of frogs I wanted to photograph, and I'm proud to say I found every one of them. That wasn't easy in a forest that conceals more than 370 known species—and many others awaiting discovery. □



Dancing a courtship cancan, a *Hylodes asper* repeatedly kicks right and left (above) to mark his streamside territory and attract mates. The *Phasmahyla guttata* tadpole (left) wears its mouth like a hat, allowing it to skim food from the surface of mountain streams. *Xenohyla truncata* (below)—the world's only frog that eats fruit as well as insects—lives near the beaches of Rio de Janeiro. And *Scinax arduous* (far left) lays its eggs in water caught in cupped bromeliad leaves.



Habitat Heroes Start Young

Kids tending to the Earth

Scoop by scoop, students at Harriet Tubman Elementary School in Washington, D.C., have transformed their school's courtyard (right). The nine- to twelve-year-olds planted native shrubs and trees and installed bat and bird houses to create a healthy, animal-friendly habitat—a feat certified by the National Wildlife Federation.

The Tubman kids are among our 30,000 Habitat Heroes, students across the U.S., Canada, and Mexico participating in the Society's Geography Action! program on habitats. Since September these heroes have also rescued ailing cactuses, created butterfly gardens, and



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restored aquatic gardens. With help from our Education Foundation, their teachers learned how to incorporate these and other environmental projects into the classroom curriculum.

Beginning in September, Geography Action! will enlist students in a new challenge—preserving world cultures. For more details, go to nationalgeo.com/geographyaction.

Photographer Scores at Animal Name Game

Photographer and entomologist Mark Moffett, who reports on wind scorpions in this issue (see page 94), has lent his name to yet another new species. On an expedition to the remote *tepui*, or mesas, of eastern Venezuela, he and colleagues César Barrio and Charles Brewer discovered a species of rocket frog. "It's a little



MARK W. MOFFETT

brown job," says Mark of the amphibian that will soon bear a scientific version of his name—the third *moffetti*. The first, a species of beetle he co-discovered in Peru

in 1976, when he was 18, became *Notiobia moffetti*. Years later Mark found a new ant species while shooting the leafcutter ant story (see NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC July 1995), and his mentor, Harvard biologist E. O. Wilson, christened it *Pheidole moffetti*. But Mark's legacy isn't confined to science. He helped novelist Amy Tan dream up a plant for her upcoming book, and she named it after him. Says Mark, "I guess I'm on a hot run right now."

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CAQUETÁ, COLOMBIA (PAGE 34)

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