



WETLANDS AND AMPHIBIANS

The dominant tree in this part of the wetland is the Pin Oak (*Quercus Palustris*), a tree that is adapted to be under water longer than any other tree species in this region. Notice that the water marks on the tree trunks are deeper than those seen on the trees elsewhere, an indication that this area of the depression forest is the deepest and slowest to drain.

The frequent flooding of the wetland sustains an abundant community of amphibians. The watery ephemeral refuges serve as a breeding ground for several species of frogs, toads, and salamanders. These animals characteristically have and must maintain a moist skin, which can be used as a breathing surface, like an inverted lung. In fact, some of the salamander species (Family Plethodonidae) found in the nearby leaf litter or under rocks and logs in the area have lost their lungs completely and use their skin as their exclusive respiratory organ. Two amphibians inhabiting this wetland are of special interest, the Jefferson's Salamander and the Wood Frog. Jefferson's Salamander (*Ambystoma jeffersonianum*) is a type of mole salamander that is active above ground primarily during early spring (February – March) breeding season, and occasionally during heavy nighttime summer showers. During these breeding periods, a male will court a female by performing a dance of sorts with a good deal of body contact to lead her to a particular breeding location on the bottom of the pool. The young remain in the water with gills until they metamorph into adult salamanders. As salamanders go, these amphibians are robust with a rounded head, thick body with short legs. They are brown to slate gray in color with light blue flecks along the sides of their bodies. They consume insects, earthworms, and other invertebrates. The Wood Frog (*Lithobates sylvaticus*) is a rare species to be found in Northern Kentucky. While relatively abundant across the River in Ohio, this wetland holds one of the few populations of this species in the Northern Kentucky region. Like the Jefferson's Salamander, the Wood Frog is one of the first amphibians breeding in the spring, sometimes while there is still ice on the water. They are an explosive breeder, which means that there is a very small window of time (one to two weeks) in which males and females come together in the wetlands to lay clutches of eggs. The call of the male Wood Frog sounds like squabbling ducks, yet this is enough to attract the females to the breeding location. Tadpoles remain in the pond until late spring when they metamorph into small froglets. These frogs are brown to bronze in color with a black mask around their eyes. They inhabit the forest floor of undisturbed deciduous woodlands, and are voracious consumers of mosquitoes and other insects. These frogs remain in the leaf litter throughout winter, and have the amazing capacity to be frozen as solid as an ice cube, only to thaw in the spring and head for the nearest breeding water.

