

Pet Treefrog - 1793

Article provided by Jon Coote



FIG. 84.—THE CHANGEABLE TREE-FROG (*Hyla versicolor*).

Colorized image of a *Hyla versicolor* tree frog from The Vivarium by Rev. Gregory C. Bateman, A.K.C., published 1897.

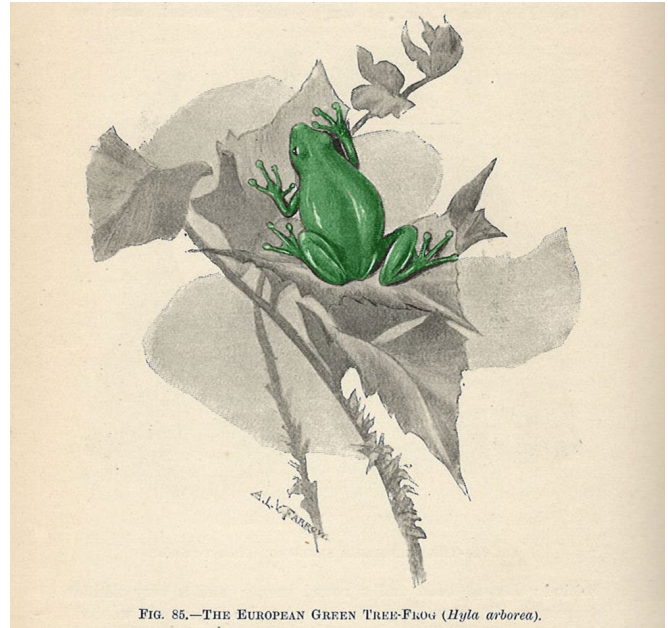


FIG. 85.—THE EUROPEAN GREEN TREE-FROG (*Hyla arborea*).

Colorized image of a *Hyla arborea* tree frog from The Vivarium by Rev. Gregory C. Bateman, A.K.C., published 1897.

'The Georgian Menagerie' by Christopher Plumb, 2015, ISBN 978 78453 084 6

Robert Townson, *Tracts and Observations in Natural History and Physiology* (London: White, 1799), p. 113.

In 1793 the English naturalist Robert Townson travelled between Göttingen and Vienna on horseback, a journey that took him six weeks. But he was not travelling alone, for in his pocket in a little box was his 'favourite Musidora', a female treefrog or *Rana arborea*. Common in central Europe but absent in Britain, the 'beautiful little tree frog' charmed visitors to the continent, who were particularly drawn to the frog's croak. Townson kept his frog in a glass of water in the window of his study and she became tame enough to be carried around in the palm of his hand. Sometimes she would fall from the windowsill and Townson would dust her down, returning her to her water glass. In warm rooms heated by stoves, Musidora lived through three harsh winters without the hibernation customary in her species. Townson's papers on amphibians, published in England were replete with references to his treefrog. With some pride 'I was able to feed my constant companion and favorite pet Musidora by hand with dead and living flies'. Townson was interested in the respiratory functions of amphibians and was experimenting in earnest on frogs, newts and even turtles imported from overseas for the purpose. He collected around 80 frogs in his cellar and kept them in a box. Some of the experiments were grim but Musidora was spared lethal and invasive experimentation. However, as part of his research, Townson did measure her water absorption rate and then drink water that she 'expelled', describing it as 'pure distilled water'. In his published work Townson considered his study of *Rana arborea* on a melancholy note, "I am exceedingly sorry to terminate these remarks by informing Musidora's friends (for she had many) that she is no more. She sickened soon after she reached Great Britain, and died in the night of 25th of June 1794'. He attributed her death to exposure to the sea air during the crossing from Hamburg.