

Upping the Stakes DERRICK JENSEN

MUTUAL AID

Backyard measures for drastic times

I LIVE IN A TEMPERATE redwood rainforest. I see dozens if not hundreds of redwood trees each day. The same used to be true of tadpoles. I've seen rivulets so full of tadpoles, they were pushing each other out of the water. All spring I used to see hundreds of tiny egg masses from Pacific tree frogs and dozens of larger masses from northern red-legged frogs. No longer.

I was just talking to a herpetologist at U.S. Fish and Wildlife who knows someone who thirty years ago used to see thousands of rough-skinned newts at a time, and who now sees only a couple per year. At one point it would not have been a big deal to see a passenger pigeon either; after all, there were something like six times as many passenger pigeons as all other birds in North America combined. "Oh my god, I saw a passenger pigeon!" would have been met with, "That's nice, dear, and did you see a mosquito, too?" Likewise with whales, who were once so common they were a major impediment to shipping. But as this culture continues to grind away ever faster at all that remains of the wild, we can fail to notice what's gone missing, or never even know it was ever here at all.

Which is why I spent an hour or so today with my shoes, socks, and pants off, thigh deep in cold water. I did this because the tree frogs are being killed by a mold called saprolegnia. Saprolegnia is ubiqui-

tous; normally it "cleans up" weakened eggs and egg sacs (in a Darwinian sense) by eating them. But lately the mold has been causing up to 95 percent mortality in eggs in places as far away as Spain, in the neighboring state of Oregon, and, also, the pond outside my house. I read that the reason the mold has been killing so many eggs is that increased UVB—caused by a decrease in the ozone layer, caused, of course, by the actions of the industrial economy—is weakening the eggs and their sacs. UVB radiation can't penetrate glass, so last year I brought some egg masses inside to see if I could help. I might have lost one or two, but nearly a hundred tadpoles survived, and I fed them on lettuce and fish food till they were big enough to be released back into

weeks: that would be sixteen hundred large tadpoles released into the pond. If they have even a 5 percent success rate from that point on, that would still be an increase of eighty frogs per year into this fairly small pond.

Now, normally I wouldn't want to interfere, for at least two reasons. The first is that, in contradistinction to many people in this culture, and the culture itself, I trust natural wisdom and think nature generally knows best, so I'm loath to intervene in predator/prey relationships. The second is that, if I did leave the egg sacs alone, in time those frogs emerging with a greater resistance to saprolegnia would survive and those without would not, so that in the long run frogs and mold would find a new balance. But

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the pond. My efforts this spring were curtailed by ankle surgery, but as soon as I could walk without a cast or cane, in I went. I collected probably eighty tree frog eggs and ten red-legged frog eggs. I'll collect more red-legged frog eggs tomorrow.

Next year my plan is to go in once a week from December through May and collect eighty eggs per species per week, then raise them with the same near-100-percent success rate. Let's call it twenty

since mortality at present is nearly total, in the short run the frogs would be dead. So we—the frogs, the pond, the forest and all its members (including me and, for that matter, the saprolegnia and other predators)—don't have much to lose by this manipulation.

I also don't particularly want to interfere because, to be frank, I've always hated cold water. I still remember being five and crying in the locker room of the

YMCA before swimming lessons because the pool was always so cold. Another reason I don't want to interfere is something called the giant water bug, nickname toe-biter. My bug book says they're about an inch and a half long, but as I step in, my imagination puts them at closer to five or six inches. And I can't stop thinking about the deflated frog-skin sacks I've seen (the giant water bug injects a substance that liquefies the frog's insides, so they can be sucked out as through a straw). I have read the bugs sometimes catch small birds. So you'll note I only went into the pond as deep as my thighs; I'm willing to risk a very painful bite on my toe, but there are other places I'd rather not think about being bit. The word I'm looking for to describe myself here is *wimp*. Nonetheless, I wade in, and I feel good about it.

I even now have a plan for the newts, who are dying of chytrid, a fungus that evidently hits them when they metamorphose. But I've read that they're reasonably easy to keep in big tanks, and they'll breed in these tanks too. In fact, captive-raised rough-skinned newts are sometimes sold as pets (as are wild ones caught by people I hope will be captured by space aliens and sold as pets on a planet far away). And it's possible to combat chytrid by dipping individual nymphs into a diluted solution of fungicide. So I

could also raise newts to release locally if it comes to that.

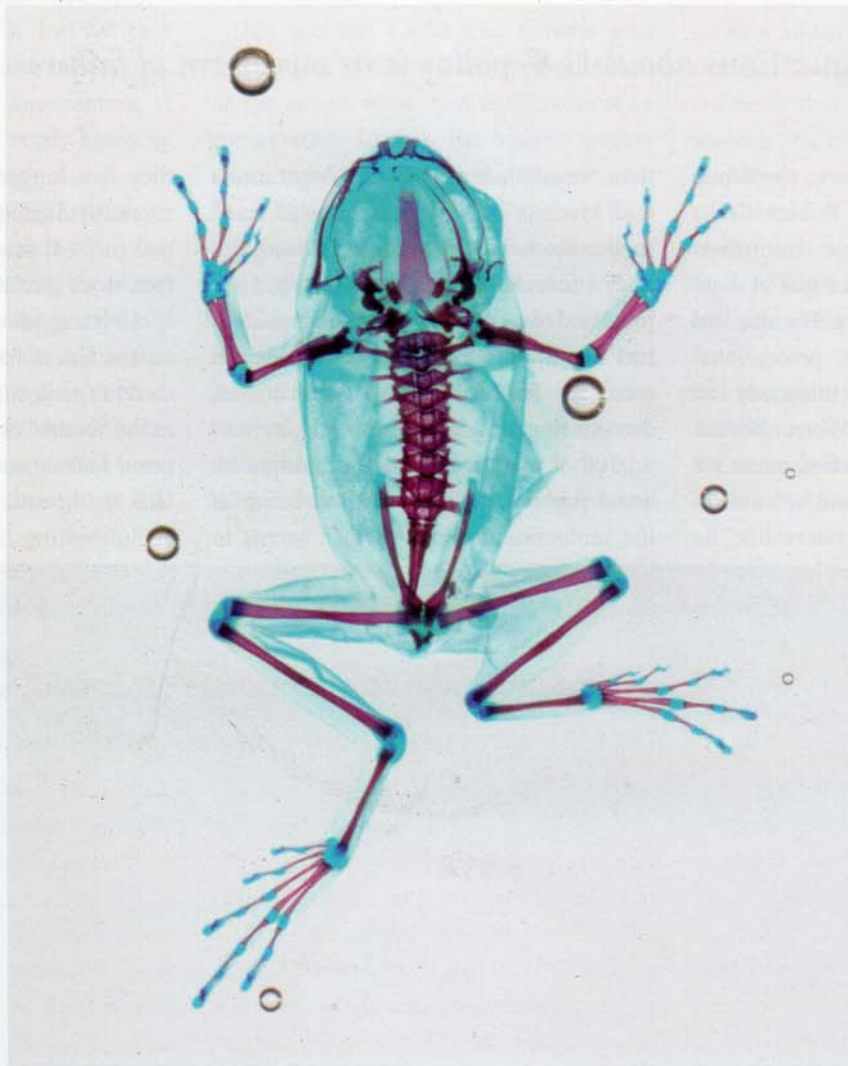
And now for the real point: In column after column, book after book, I always say we need to use whatever means necessary to protect the land where we live. Too often people assert that this is code language for violent revolt against corporations. And

suffering the extremely minor chance of getting bit by a giant water bug.

And now here's the real, real point: It only took me an hour. And it was a fun hour—an hour I spent serving my landbase instead of playing a game on a computer, or answering e-mail, or watching television, or getting pissed off and flam-

ing someone in an online forum because of a column that person wrote for *Orion*, or wasting time in some other way that does absolutely no good for the real, physical world. The obvious and even more real point is that we can all find an hour or two per week we can give to our landbases.

Yes, industrial capitalism must and will come down. Yes, the oil economy must and will cease. And there are those who can and will hasten the collapse of capitalism and the oil economy. And I aim to be, and in some senses already am, one of those people. But that doesn't alter the fact that I can spend an hour or two on a Saturday afternoon help-



then they assert that this is no solution at all, and therefore assert that I have offered no solutions. But when I say protect your landbase using whatever means necessary, I mean it. It's not that hard to figure out. Sometimes it might mean violent revolt against corporations. Sometimes it might not. Today it meant taking off my clothes, getting into reasonably cold water, and

ing the local frogs to survive. And you can do the same for the plants and animals you love, who live where you live, whose home is your home, and in whose home you live. ✎

Derrick Jensen's most recent book is Mischief in the Forest, a children's book, with illustrations by Stephanie McMillan.