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'Frogs! A Chorus of Colors' leaps into Midland's Alden B. Dow Museum



Sue White | for Mlive.com After a long trip, the African bullfrog displays his displeasure by puffing up.
"FROGS! A Chorus of Colors" continues through May 11, 2014, at the Alden B. Dow Museum of Science and Art in the Midland Center for the Arts, 1801 W. St. Andrews.

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(<http://connect.mlive.com/user/swhite/index.html>) By Sue White | For MLive.com
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MIDLAND, MI – Minutes after zookeepers Natalie Garritano and Callie Burwell brought a travel-worn cooler labeled "Live Frogs" through the gallery's back entrance, they pulled out plastic containers of every size, the sort you'd find in the average kitchen, and started peeling back the masking tape that kept the punctured covers in place.

Buried in mounds of shredded nesting was a dizzying array of amphibians, some a brilliant red, others sporting distinct stripes of black and yellow and green, and the Mexican dumpy frog a deep muddy brown that will turn to vivid green as the frogs adapt to their new surroundings.

Garritano and Burwell were preparing the critters for their two-month stay in Midland as the "Frogs! A Chorus of Colors" leaps into the Alden B. Dow Museum.

The frogs also lend themselves to artistic interpretation with two accompanying displays, "Batrachology: Amphibians in Art," featuring works of art created by artists near and far, and "Nature's Fading Chorus: The Works of Brandon Ballengee," which uses large-scale portraits of frogs to alert the public to environmental changes causing mutations.

“Batrachology” and “Nature’s Fading Chorus” run through Sunday, April 13, while “Frogs! A Chorus of Colors” continues through Sunday, May 11. The museum, located in the Midland Center for the Arts, 1801 W. St. Andrews, is open from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Wednesday, Friday and Saturday; 10 a.m. to 8 p.m. Thursday and 1 to 5 p.m. Sunday. Admission costs \$9 for adults and \$6 for youth 4-14.

The smaller frogs on display live five to seven years while bigger ones like the massive African bullfrog could turn 10. The exhibit’s giant monkey frogs, who climb like a monkey rather than hop, are the old men in the mix, and speaking of the African bullfrog, did we know that it only poops once every two months?

The zookeepers in charge work quickly, wearing gloves not because of the toxins on every frogs’ skin but so that the human bacteria on their hands don’t hurt the frogs. By the way, toads don’t give you warts.

And if you notice a pair of frogs giving each other piggy-back rides, that’s just what they’re doing. Mating froggy-style begins with the male hugging the female around the waist and holding on for days for the sheer purpose of keeping any other suitors at a distance.

Then, once the female lays her eggs, the male fertilizes them and the exhibit’s population grows with tadpoles filling the pools.

“When we see eggs in the water, we know they’ve happily settled into their new habitat,” Garritano said.

A running soundtrack of various frog calls echoes through the exhibit, too, but the real beck-and-call happens at night between the nocturnal inhabitants.

“I remembered the joy and excitement surrounding the live snake and lizard displays we had in the past,” said Museum Director Bruce Winslow. “And we don’t often see the quality of this exhibit available to us, at a cost we can handle.”

One of four touring exhibits from the Pennsylvania-based Clyde Peeling’s Reptiland, it most recently spent months camped out at the American Museum of Natural History in New York City. It came, too, with special challenges, Winslow said, from expanded electrical connections to arriving boxes of nutritious crickets and fruit flies.

“It’s the sort of exhibit that will get young, fertile minds going, creating a buzz with everything happening around it,” he added, with more than 8,000 students expected to visit the exhibit.

Visitors can press buttons to create a chorus of distinctly different frog calls. Another kiosk invites them to a visual dissection, which harms no frogs in the process. There’s even an old-fashioned zoetrope that with a good spin will recreate a leaping frog.

And events throughout the four-month run will expand on the experience, from feeding sessions to scout sleepovers and a family fun day, “Frog Frenzy,” on Feb. 1 where everyone can join the fun. Go online to [mcfta.org/frogs](http://www.mcfta.org/frogs) (<http://www.mcfta.org/frogs>) for more information.

The best way to take it all in, said Garritano, is to give yourself enough time to read the information boards and play a game of hide-and-seek with the frogs.

“They are masters of disguise,” she warned. “Don’t just give up and walk away. It’s fun to see how they blend right in and it’s a game to find them.”