

Waiting for Summer

by William H. Woodin

It always amazes me how people who profess to love the desert will forsake it during its most interesting and exciting period.

Summer in southern Arizona is a time of wonder. The warm tropical nights are punctuated by brilliant displays of lightning, second only - I am told - to south Florida in intensity. Sometimes there will be almost continual lightning in one small cloud; hard to imagine the processes at work here. Occasionally lightning bugs will contribute their small bit, flashing twice, followed by a long pause; quite unlike their eastern cousins. On the hill above our house strange plants appear, lying rootless on the desert floor, looking like pieces of dark green kelp when wet, and shriveling to tiny black shreds during the dry season.

We leave our bedroom door open all summer, and the nights are interesting, if not always tranquil. The cats come in with their trophies to show us; once our massive black cat Blackie jumped on the bed carrying a full-grown cottontail. The giant Colorado River toads come and go. The west-side toad has to navigate a 10-inch sill, a seemingly impossible feat for such a huge creature. But he floats effortlessly to the top like a cat, and down the other side into the bedroom. Sometimes he makes it no farther than the dogs' water dish, where he stays, completely filling the dish, until early light. His departure is marked by irate squawks from the king parrot who lives directly above, and who for some reason finds him terrifying.

The east-side toad comes in through the dog door and hops down the hall to our little fountain, which he finds so to his liking that he often remains for days, sitting on a rock and looking for all the world like a miniature Jabba the Hut. The house is filled with the small canyon spotted toads which come out in force at night, making walking somewhat treacherous.

Several times during the night the dogs rush out barking furiously at raccoons or javelinas. And in the early morning a particularly obnoxious coyote called Loony - who really does sound like a loon - and his friends send the dogs into further paroxysms.

By mid-September the summer rains are winding down, and the vultures, white-winged doves and elf owls in their wisdom have left for more temperate climes. By mid-October the skies are boring blue, the nights chilly, and a gloom has settled upon the land. Scorpius has headed westward toward the tropics, and soon the dreaded winter constellation Orion will make its appearance, glowering over the eastern mountains.

The toads have retired to their burrows, and so will I - waiting for summer.