

# The Song of the South

It was Thursday, July 3, the evening before the much-anticipated Fourth of July celebration, when my wife, Lola, called my attention to a very unique sound.

“Did you hear it?” she asked. I listened, and, sure enough, high in the trees outside the window of the hotel in Cookeville, Tennessee, where we were staying, was the song of the South – katydids warming up for their nightly concert. This was the first time I had heard them this year, and that is significant (I’ll explain later).

The katydid is a large, green insect with long antennae (feelers). It is a type of long-horned grasshopper. Its name comes from the love call of a certain male species in the eastern United States, more specifically, the southern half.

Katydids rub the bases of their front wings together to make their sounds. Many katydids begin their “songs” at twilight and continue all night.

But this column is not intended to be a scientific treatise on katydids. You will notice, as you read on, that it has very little to do with science.


Katydids are ensconced in folklore. Old-time farmers will tell you that when the first katydids’ song is heard, the first frost will cover the earth 90 days later. That would mean we can expect the first frost – in these parts – October 1. Admittedly, that’s early, but don’t count their forecast out! I’ve tracked their record over the years, and katydids are right more often than not.

While the katydids’ “music” – and that’s stretching the definition of the term – is a song of love to the species, it is a melody of memories for me. I can remember hearing the katydids as ...

- A lullaby as I lay in bed while the wind coming through an open window gently swished the curtain.
- I peered from a farmhouse porch across the meadow to admire rows of corn bathed in the golden glow of a full moon.
- I walked barefoot along the path to the house, carrying a string of freshly caught fish.
- I stretched out in the front-porch swing, the legs of my jeans rolled up, and dreamed of years to come and what they might hold.

(more)



- 
- I read about, and lived, the adventures of Mark Twain and Huckleberry Finn.
  - The family strolled along, chatting with neighbors, after a revival service at church.
  - Darkness forced the end of a softball game on the vacant lot down the road.
  - Relatives visited, and we produced homemade ice cream on the back porch.
  - I walked up nervously to the front door to pick up a date, and then, as I returned her home afterward.
  - We sat, after marriage, at the top of the outside stairs to our tiny apartment and held hands.

Katydidids have a way of stirring the inner self; they have been such an abiding presence in the summers of my youth and adulthood.

I told you this wasn't about science.

– Beecher Hunter

