

FROGS OF WISCONSIN



**Information from
Wisconsin DNR**

Western Chorus Frog

(Pseudacris triseriata)

Size: .7 to 1.2 in.

Description: The western chorus frog is pale green or tan with three long, broken, brown stripes running lengthwise along the body. An additional stripe runs from the nostril, through

the eye, to the rear legs. Under this stripe is a white line running the length of the lip. The limbs have dark spots or crossbars. The boreal chorus frog is a light gray to cream color with thick, dark green dorsal stripes. The chorus frog's call is like the sound produced when running your fingernail over the fine teeth of a plastic comb. Marshes, wet prairies, river-bottom forests, shrub wetlands and old moist fields are favored habitats. Chorus frogs call from within grassy clumps in water and are nearly impossible to visually locate.



Spring Peeper

(Pseudacris crucifer)

Size: .7 to 1.1 in.

Description: The northern spring peeper has an irregular dark “X” marking on its light tan to brownish back. They have a dark bar that runs between the eyes and slightly enlarged toe pads that allow them to grip and climb on vertical vegetation. They are one of the first frogs to begin

calling in spring and most successfully reproduce in fishless wetlands. Their call is a very shrill and repetitious “peep.” Spring peepers live primarily in moist forests and larger woodlots and breed in wetlands within and adjacent to these habitats. The Wisconsin Frog and Toad Survey shows this species to be in decline, even though they are still widespread and common.



Pickerel Frog

(Lithobates palustris)

Species Overview

Pickerel frogs (*Lithobates palustris*) are a Species of Special Concern in Wisconsin. It has a rather complex habitat range as it prefers to overwinter in cold water streams, seepage pools or spring

holes, often taking advantage of water cress for cover. It moves to warmer water ponds to breed and lay eggs from April through mid-June. Adults spend most of the active season foraging on land in riparian habitats along streams and rivers. This species is active from late March to early November but can remain semi-active in winter under water. Larvae metamorphose from mid-July to mid-August.

Size: 1.75 to 3.25 in.

Description: The pickerel frog is greenish-brown with paired dark brown blotches between its dorsolateral folds. The undersides of the thigh and groin are a bright golden-yellow. The hind legs are patterned with dark blotches or cross bars. This species can be mistaken for the northern leopard frog when viewed from above, but its blotches tend to be rectangular, while the leopard frog's blotches are more rounded. The snore-like call of the pickerel frog is shorter and less broken than the leopard frog, and has less carrying power. Adult pickerel frogs prefer cold water habitats (springs and trout streams) for living and hibernating, but females often breed in adjacent permanent warm-water wetlands in order to speed the development of their young.



Northern Leopard Frog

(Rana pipiens)

Size: 2.0 to 3.5 in.

Description: The northern leopard frog has a background color of green or light brown with scattered, large rounded brown spots bordered in yellow, especially on spots between the

dorsolateral folds. Their ventral side is creamy white without yellow thigh or groin markings. The leopard frog's call is a loud, broken snore, somewhat like dragging your finger over a well-inflated balloon. They breed in a wide variety of wetlands, especially in fishless waters, and they may forage far from water in old fields and

prairies. Northern leopard frogs experienced major die-offs in the early 1970s in the upper midwest and the decline continues. Scientists have noted that they do not live as long as they once did (about 2 years versus 3-4 years) and appear to lay far fewer eggs than in the past.



Northern Cricket Frog

(*Acris crepitans*)

Species Overview

Northern cricket frog (*Acris crepitans*), an endangered species in Wisconsin, prefer ponds, lakes, and a variety of habitats along and adjacent to streams and rivers including, marshes, fens, sedge meadows, low

prairies, and exposed mud flats. The species tends to breed in quite water (no or low flow) and may also move from streams and rivers to adjacent wetlands and ponds. Cricket frogs cannot tolerate freezing or complete inundation for more than 24 hours during the winter and seek a variety of microhabitats that provide suitable overwintering conditions, including crayfish burrows, small mammal burrows, rotted-out root channels, seepage areas where groundwater flow prevents freezing at the surface or spaces created by sloughing streambanks. Cricket frogs are active from late-March through November. Breeding occurs from mid-May through mid-August, with some larvae not transforming until late September.



Identification: The northern cricket frog is a tiny (7/8 to 1 1/4 inch long, snout to vent),

nonclimbing member of the treefrog family which lives in ponds and streams of southwestern Wisconsin. The frog is named for the biologist who first described it, Frank Nelson Blanchard, and for its distinctive cricket-like call. Male and female Blanchard's cricket frogs look alike, but females are usually larger. Males have a dark vocal sac on their throats that they inflate to help make their mating call. Back color is variable, but is usually brown, gray, olive, or tan, sometimes with a green or reddish stripe running down the middle. Their moist skin has raised reddish spots, or warts. There is sometimes a dark triangle or V-shaped spot between their eyes, often rust or lime green in color. Bellies are white and each thigh has dark, ragged crossbars that create a somewhat netlike pattern.



Habitat: Cricket frogs require reasonably permanent water in open country. Open mud flats and stream banks with abundant, low emergent vegetation are preferred. They inhabit marshes, fens, and wet prairies near permanent or flowing water. In lakes and ponds they prefer aquatic sites where submergent vegetation grows along the shorelines.

State Distribution: The northern cricket frog was once considered one of the most abundant frogs in southern Wisconsin. Over the past several decades this species has rapidly declined for unknown reasons throughout Wisconsin and the Upper Midwest. The cricket frog is still relatively abundant in Grant, Iowa, and Lafayette counties, and has been confirmed at sites in La Crosse, Vernon, and Waukesha counties since 2005. Additional unconfirmed reports (not yet verified by a species expert) have been received over the past several years from throughout the cricket frog's historic range in the state. While the cause of this dramatic decline is not certain, it is known that cricket frogs can't survive in polluted water. Several factors are suspected to be involved, including drought (especially during winter), increased amounts of pesticides, fertilizers, highway salts, and other pollutants that degrade water quality and the loss or fragmentation of wetlands in the southern part of the state. The tremendous flooding of 1993 which resulted in the flushing of several key rivers twice during cricket frog breeding is suspected to be the cause for the most recent declines. Low populations and a very limited life span will severely limit recovery.

Global Distribution: Historically, Blanchard's cricket frogs were found from Southwestern Ontario, Michigan, and Ohio west to Nebraska and south to include most of Texas. Small populations extend into eastern Colorado and New Mexico. Today, this species has almost disappeared from much of the Northern portion of its range, including Ontario, most of Michigan, Minnesota, Wisconsin, Illinois, and Iowa. In Wisconsin, the historical range of the Blanchard's cricket frog was limited to the southern half of the state.

Diet: Blanchard's cricket frogs mostly eat tiny insects including beetles, spiders, midge larvae, water boatmen, springtails, and small slugs and crickets. They feed both day and night and consume large numbers of prey. One study estimated that in Wisconsin, 100 cricket frogs living around a small pond would consume 480,000 insects and other small vertebrates in one season.

Life History: Cricket frogs live mostly on the edges of ponds and streams with submerged or emergent vegetation. Look for them sitting on aquatic plants or sitting at the water's edge. Cricket frogs are mostly diurnal (active during the day) in spring and fall, but also nocturnal (active after dark) in May through July when males call night and day to attract mates. Their distinctive mating call sounds like steel marbles clicking together. It starts slowly, accelerates, then slows down quickly. Cricket frogs are sexually mature when one year old. They breed in late May to late July. A male will mate with any female that approaches him. He grasps her body, stimulating her to release eggs while he releases sperm. The eggs are attached to submergent vegetation in clumps of 10 - 15 and are fertilized outside the body. A single female may lay up to 300 eggs. Eggs hatch in a few days into tiny tadpoles (0.4 inches long) that have a black-tipped tail. No other tadpoles have this trait. Tadpoles metamorphose (change) between late July and late August. The average lifespan of an adult cricket frog is four months. This very short lifespan means that the entire population can turn over in only 16 months. Cricket frogs can leap great distances, despite their small size. With long legs that are over half of their extended body length, cricket frogs can jump more than three feet. That's like a six foot tall person jumping 200 feet! Cricket frogs escape predators (e.g. fish, snakes, herons, mink) with a quick series of zig-zagging, erratic leaps. Cricket frogs are cold-blooded. This means that they

cannot maintain a steady body temperature like birds and mammals. To survive Wisconsin's freezing winters, they hibernate from late November until late March.

Mink Frog

(*Lithobates septentrionalis*)

Species Overview

Mink frogs (*Rana septentrionalis*), a species of special concern, prefer rivers and lakes with bog shoreline habitats. They are a shoreline-dependent species but also forage on and around

floating mats of vegetation away from the shoreline in the littoral zone. They may sometimes be found in permanent waters where no bog characteristics exist, although they are usually associated with tannin-stained waters. Mink frogs overwinter in water to avoid freezing. They are active from April through October and breed from June through July. Larvae overwinter before transforming the following summer.

Size: 2.0 to 2.75 in.

Description: The background color of the mink frog is olive to brown, often with spots or mottling on its back, sides and legs. The sides of the head and upper lips are bright green. Dorsolateral ridges may or may not be present but are rarely complete and almost always broken if present. This frog may sometimes be mistaken for the green frog, but once in hand can be distinguished by smelling the skin, which has a distinct musk-like odor. Their call sounds like horses' hooves trotting on a cobblestone street. Mink frogs live only in northern Wisconsin in association with lakes and rivers. They prefer to rest on floating vegetation, like bog mats or lily pads, away from the immediate shoreline. Mink frogs breed in summer and deposit globular masses of up to 4,000 eggs in submergent vegetation.



Green Frog

(Rana clamitans)

Size: 2.4 to 3.5 in.

Description: Green frogs have a light to dark olive green or brown background color with small, irregular dark brown spots. Spots are often more numerous in juveniles. They have prominent dorsolateral folds that run from behind the eye to

about mid-body. Like bullfrogs, adult male green frogs have bright yellow chins. Their calls are low “gung-gung-gung” —like strumming on a loose banjo string. Eggs are laid in a mass attached to floating vegetation on the water’s surface. Because their young often overwinter as tadpoles, green frogs require permanent water, like deep marshes, large ponds and lakes. Recent studies show that heavy shoreline development significantly reduces populations, primarily because of lost natural shoreline vegetation.



Eastern Gray Treefrog

(Hyla versicolor)

Size: 1.5 to 2.0 in.



Description: The chameleon-like eastern gray treefrog changes color with temperature or

substrate color. Their background color varies from gray to green with blackish mottling. Unlike the Cope's gray treefrog, easterns do not lose their mottling when warm, although it may fade. In all cases, easterns have a white spot below each eye and bright yellow inner thigh markings. Toe pads are pronounced and serve as suction

cups to cling to various surfaces. Their call is more melodic than the Cope's. This species will call beyond the breeding season, especially on warm, rainy or humid days. Eastern gray treefrogs are forest and large woodlot dwellers and breed in semi-permanent to permanent wetlands.



Eastern American Toad

(Bufo americanus)

Size: 2 to 3.5 in.

Description: The eastern American toad can easily be identified by its dry rough skin and large swellings behind the eyes (paratoid glands). Its dorsal color can vary from brown to reddish to olive, with scattered dark spots, each encircling one to three wart-like bumps on the back. Their thick skin, which traps in body fluids better than most amphibians, allows toads to live greater

distances from water than most frogs. Toads live in a wide variety of habitats ranging from prairies to wetlands to forests. They are somewhat adapted to urban settings where they occasionally persist in gardens and parks. The toad's call is a long, uninterrupted trill lasting up to 30 seconds. Each male has a slightly different pitch. They lay eggs in long strands, unique among Wisconsin's amphibians. Toad tadpoles form schools, also unique among Wisconsin frogs.



Cope's Gray Treefrog

(Hyla chrysoscelis)

Size: 1.25 to 2.0 in.

Description: Although smaller and slightly smoother skinned than the eastern gray treefrog, the Cope's gray treefrog can be tough to distinguish from this close cousin, especially during the breeding season when both are usually heavily mottled on the dorsal (top) side. However, Cope's is often a solid lime

green on the back during the non-breeding season. Cope's, like the eastern gray, has bright yellow inner thigh markings when viewed from the underside or laterally when the legs are extended and has obvious toe pads. They can most easily be distinguished from the eastern gray during the breeding season by their call, which is short and raspy. Cope's lives primarily along forest or woodlot edges and in oak savannahs, favoring brush over trees.



American Bullfrog

(Lithobates catesbeianus)

Size: 5.5 to 7 in.

Description: The bullfrog can range from a dark solid olive to a lighter pale green with variable spotting. They have a distinct tympanic fold that wraps around the tympanum (ear membrane).

Adult males often have bright yellow chins during the breeding season and their tympanum is twice as big as the eye. The female's tympanum is about the size of the eye. Their call is a deep resonating "jug-o-rum" that carries well. Bullfrogs are a shoreline dependent species and are highly aquatic. Because their tadpoles do not metamorphose until at least their second year, bullfrogs require permanent water habitats like lakes. They prefer habitats with tall, undisturbed shoreline vegetation and abundant submergent and floating aquatic vegetation. Females can lay up to 20,000 eggs in large films among floating vegetation on the water's surface.



Wood Frog

(Rana sylvatica)

Size: 1.5 to 2.5 in.

Description: The wood frog's dorsal color varies from pinkish-tan to brown with a very dark brown "mask" through and behind its eyes, fully encompassing the tympanum. The upper lip is lined

in white. The dorsolateral fold is colored a light tan with numerous black marking along its length. The wood frog's call sounds somewhat like a quacking duck. They prefer moist forests and large woods where an intact understory creates a humid microclimate. Like other early spring breeders, wood frogs usually breed in ephemeral (fishless) ponds created by snow melt and spring rains. They have the shortest breeding window of any Wisconsin frog, starting just after frost-out and lasting only about two weeks. Females usually cluster their egg masses together within a pond.

