

NATURAL HISTORY

CHARACTERISTICS OF WISCONSIN FROGS AND TOADS

There are 12 frog and toad species, collectively called "anurans", native to Wisconsin. Most Wisconsin anurans are generally present throughout the state: American toad, spring peeper, gray treefrog, Cope's gray treefrog, green frog, northern leopard frog, pickerel frog, wood frog, and American bullfrog. However, the mink frog is found only in northern Wisconsin and the Blanchard's cricket frog is found only in southwestern Wisconsin. As of 1989 chorus frogs in Wisconsin were split into two distinct species, western chorus frogs and boreal chorus frogs. More recently (2007), evidence from mitochondrial data has revised the geographic ranges of these two species, suggesting that all chorus frogs in Wisconsin belong to the boreal chorus frog species.

Even though some Wisconsin anurans spend part of their life cycle on land, all 12 species require water for breeding and have specific breeding habitat requirements. Some anurans breed in temporary waters while others require permanent bodies of water. Anurans may utilize woodland pools, cool waters of spring-fed seeps, water that accumulates in agricultural field depressions, cattail marshes, or shallow margins of lakes and streams. Eggs are laid in the water by the female and are fertilized by the male while clasping her. The eggs hatch into tadpoles that metamorphose into young frogs or toads in varying lengths of time, dependent upon the species.

Detailed information on Wisconsin anurans is presented by Vogt (1981). Additional information is also located on our website, <http://wiatri.net/inventory/frogtoadsurvey/>. For quick reference, a brief general description of each Wisconsin anuran including its status, physical description, breeding habitat, breeding phenology, call description, and distribution is presented here.

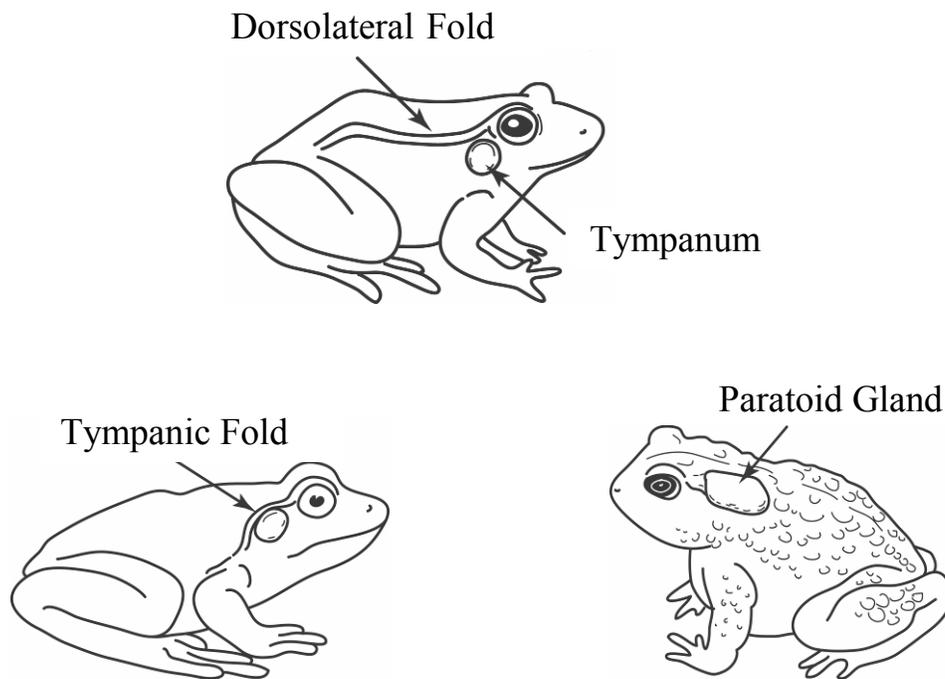


Figure 2. Anuran structures referred to in general descriptions.

WOOD FROG

Lithobates sylvaticus

Status:

Common

Physical Description:

1.5-2.75 inches (3.8-7.0 cm); pink, tan, or dark brown; dark mask through the eye; prominent dorsolateral ridges; light stripe on upper lip.

Breeding Habitat:

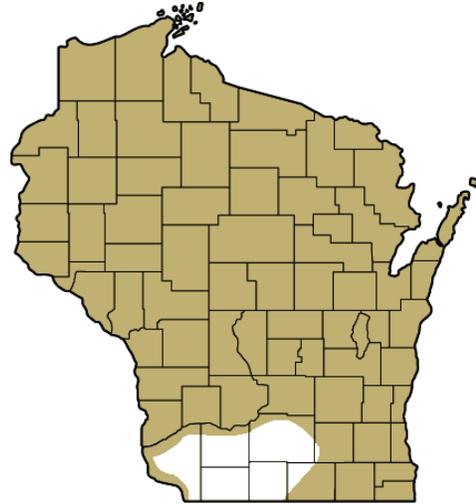
Temporary bodies of water within or adjacent to moist wooded areas.

Breeding Phenology:

Late March through early May (short-term breeder, typically only calls for 2 weeks during this period)

Call:

A hoarse, subtle quacking with little carrying power.



BOREAL CHORUS FROG

Pseudacris maculata

Status:

Common

Physical Description:

0.75-1.25 inches (1.9-3.2 cm); greenish-gray to brown; 3 dark stripes down the back; light stripe on upper lip; small, round toe pads.

Breeding Habitat:

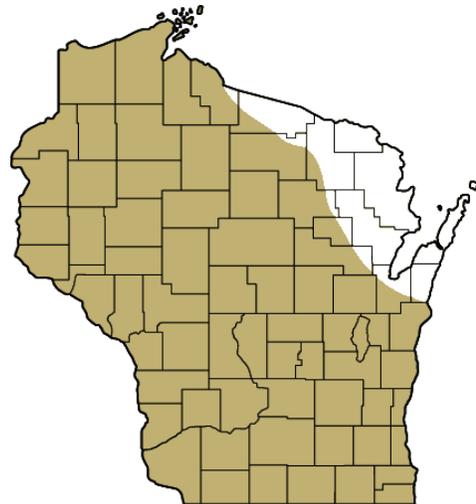
A variety of shallow, often temporary, bodies of water.

Breeding Phenology:

Late March through May

Call:

A “creek” lasting 1 or 2 seconds; similar to the sound of a fingernail running along the teeth of a fine-toothed comb.



SPRING PEEPER

Pseudacris crucifer

Status:

Common but declining

Physical Description:

0.75-1.25 inches (1.9-3.2 cm); tan, brown, or gray; a dark, often imperfect, “X” on the back; modest toe pads.

Breeding Habitat:

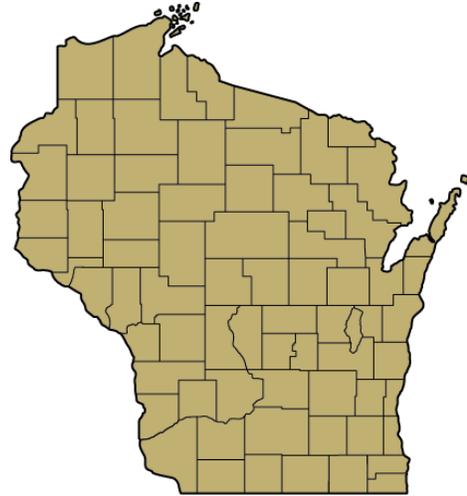
Temporary or semi-permanent marshes, swamps, and ponds within or adjacent to wooded areas.

Breeding Phenology:

Late March through May

Call:

A high ascending “peep”, sometimes with a short trill; a full chorus resembles the jingling of bells.



NORTHERN LEOPARD FROG

Lithobates pipiens

Status:

Species of special concern, common but significantly declining

Physical Description:

2.0-3.5 inches (5.1-8.9 cm); green, brown, or tan; rounded dark spots, often with light borders; light stripe on upper lip; dorsolateral ridges extend to the groin.

Breeding Habitat:

Lakes, streams, rivers, ponds; often far from standing water (the “meadow frog”) during the summer.

Breeding Phenology:

Late March through mid-June

Call:

A deep, rattling, broken snore interspersed with “chuckling”; resembles the sound of a thumb rubbing against a balloon; somewhat similar to the call of the pickerel frog.



PICKEREL FROG

Lithobates palustris

Status:

Species of special concern

Physical Description:

1.75-3.25 inches (4.4-8.2 cm); brown or tan; rectangular spots, without light borders, in parallel rows down the back; bright yellow or orange coloring on underside hind legs; light stripe on upper lip; dorsolateral ridges extend to the groin.

Breeding Habitat:

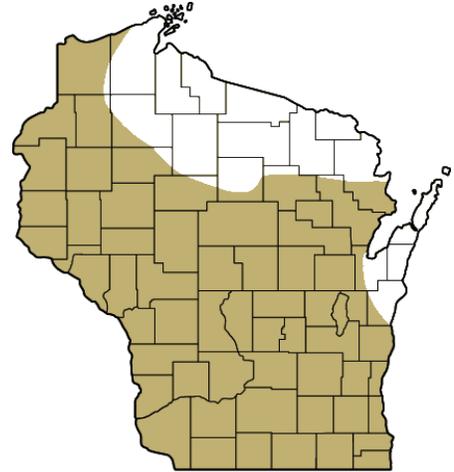
Cool, clear waters of spring-fed lakes, ponds, and streams; adjacent warm water habitats.

Breeding Phenology:

Mid-April through mid-June

Call:

A steady, low-pitched, short and constant snore with little carrying power; somewhat similar to the call of the northern leopard frog.



AMERICAN TOAD

Anaxyrus americanus

Status:

Common

Physical Description:

2.0-4.5 inches (5.1-11.4 cm); brown, red, or olive with darker warts; dry, rough skin; paratoid glands located behind each eye.

Breeding Habitat:

A variety of shallow water habitats.

Breeding Phenology:

Late April through mid-July (often an explosive breeder with the majority of individuals breeding in a 1-3 day period)

Call:

A musical trill lasting up to 30 seconds; considerable individual variation in tone.



GRAY TREEFROG*

(formerly EASTERN GRAY TREEFROG)

Hyla versicolor

Status:

Common

Physical Description:

1.25-2.0 inches (3.2-5.1 cm); green, gray, or brown and capable of changing color based on environmental conditions; darker blotches usually present; bright yellow or orange coloring on inner thighs; large toe pads.

Breeding Habitat:

A variety of permanent and semi-permanent bodies of water within or adjacent to wooded areas.

Breeding Phenology:

Late April through mid-July

Call:

A short, loud trill lasting up to 10 seconds; slower and more melodic than the call of the Cope's gray treefrog.



COPE'S GRAY TREEFROG*

Hyla chrysoscelis

Status:

Common but declining

Physical Description:

1.25-2.0 inches (3.2-5.1 cm); green, gray, or brown and capable of changing color based on environmental conditions; dark blotches often present; bright yellow or orange coloring on inner thighs; large toe pads.

Breeding Habitat:

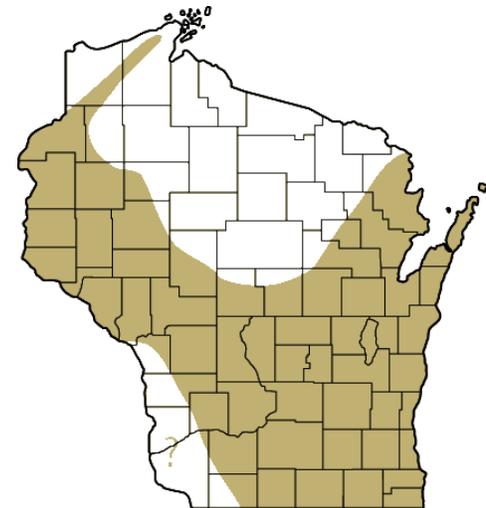
A variety of permanent and semi-permanent bodies of water in open areas and adjacent to wooded areas.

Breeding Phenology:

Late April through mid-July

Call:

A short, loud, raspy call lasting up to 1 second; faster and harsher than the gray treefrog. A nasally "wa-a-a-a".



**Few consistent physical differences exist between the gray treefrog and Cope's gray treefrog, however their calls are distinct.*

BLANCHARD'S CRICKET FROG

Acris blanchardi

Status:

Endangered, extremely rare

Physical Description:

0.75-1.5 inches (1.9-3.8 cm); brown, tan, gray or green and capable of changing color based on environmental conditions; darker brown, green or red dorsal stripe may be present; dark triangle between eyes sometimes present; rough skin; longitudinal dark stripe on back of thigh.

Breeding Habitat:

A variety of semi-permanent and permanent bodies of water with submergent and emergent vegetation.

Breeding Phenology:

Late May through mid-August

Call:

Resembles the clicking of pebbles or steel marbles; first increasing in speed and then sharply dropping off.



MINK FROG

Lithobates septentrionalis

Status:

Locally common

Physical Description:

1.75-2.75 inches (4.4-7.0 cm); green to brown often with spots or mottling on the back, sides, and legs; dorsolateral ridges absent; skin produces a musky, mink-like odor.

Breeding Habitat:

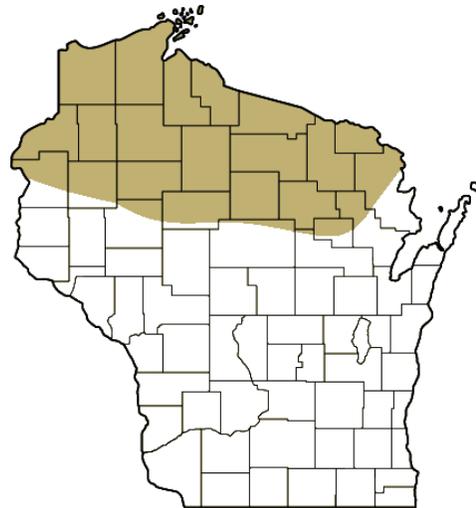
Cool, permanent water with abundant vegetation; often associated with bogs along lakes and streams.

Breeding Phenology:

June through mid-August

Call:

Resembles the sound of horses' hooves trotting over a cobblestone street.



GREEN FROG

Lithobates clamitans

Status:

Common

Physical Description:

2.25-3.5 inches (5.7-8.9 cm); green to brown; small dark spots often present on back, especially in younger individuals; dorsolateral ridges end on the body, do not reach groin; green on upper lip.

Breeding Habitat:

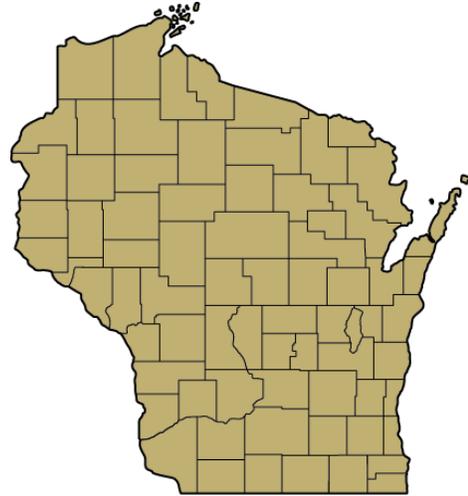
All types of permanent bodies of water.

Breeding Phenology:

Late May through mid-August

Call:

Similar to the twang of a loose banjo string; usually given as a single note.



AMERICAN BULLFROG

Lithobates catesbeianus

Status:

Species of special concern, locally common

Physical Description:

3.5-6.0 inches (8.9-15.2 cm); green to brown; dark markings often present on body; no dorsolateral ridges on the back, but obvious tympanic ridge.

Breeding Habitat:

All types of permanent bodies of water.

Breeding Phenology:

Late May through mid-August

Call:

Deep bass notes similar to a foghorn; resembles the sound made by drawing a bow across a bass fiddle; “jug-o-rum”.

