

## NATURAL HISTORY

### CHARACTERISTICS OF WISCONSIN FROGS AND TOADS

There are 13 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, leopard frog, pickerel frog, wood frog, and bullfrog. However, the mink frog is found only in northern Wisconsin and the cricket frog is found only in southwestern Wisconsin. Chorus frogs in Wisconsin have recently been split into two distinct species, western chorus frogs and boreal chorus frogs. The chorus frogs collectively are found throughout most of Wisconsin, however precise range boundaries have not yet been determined for the new species individually.

Even though some Wisconsin anurans spend part of their life cycle on land, all 13 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://inventory.Wlatri.net/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.

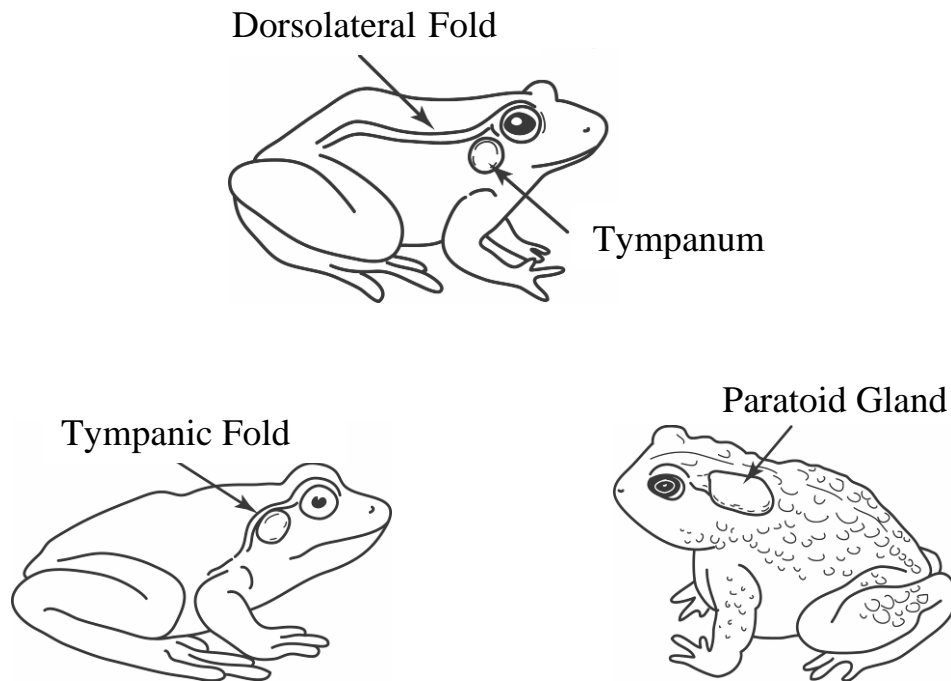


Figure 2. Anuran structures referred to in general descriptions.

**WOOD FROG**

*Rana sylvatica*

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:

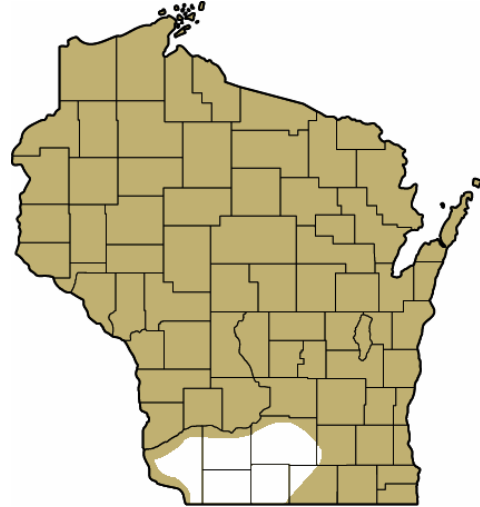
Temporary bodies of water within or adjacent to moist wooded areas.

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.



**WESTERN CHORUS FROG \***

*Pseudacris triseriata*

**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:

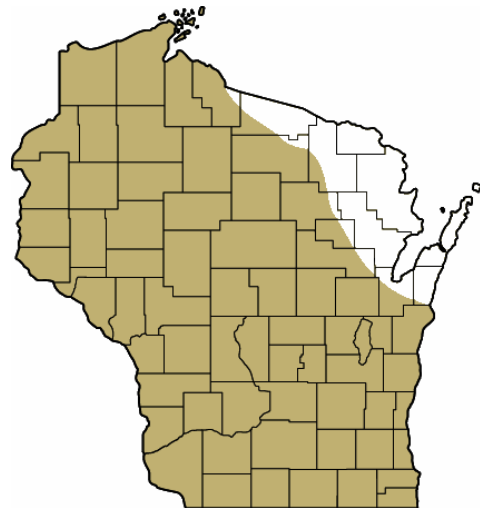
A variety of shallow, often temporary, bodies of water.

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.



*\*The western and boreal chorus frogs are now distinct species but are combined for the WFTS because their calls are nearly indistinguishable.*

**NORTHERN SPRING PEEPER**

*Pseudacris crucifer 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:

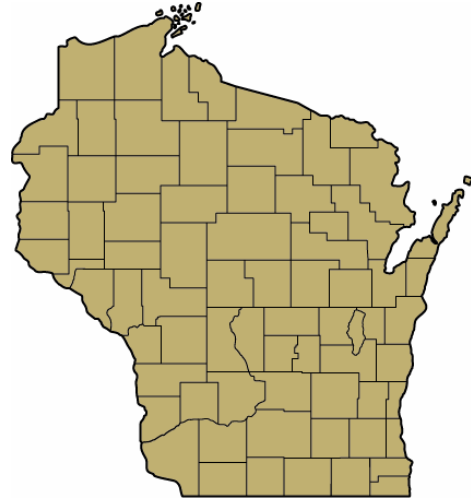
Temporary or semi-permanent marshes, swamps, and ponds within or adjacent to wooded areas.

Breeding Phenology:

Late March through May

Call:

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



---

**NORTHERN LEOPARD FROG**

*Rana pipiens*

Status:

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:

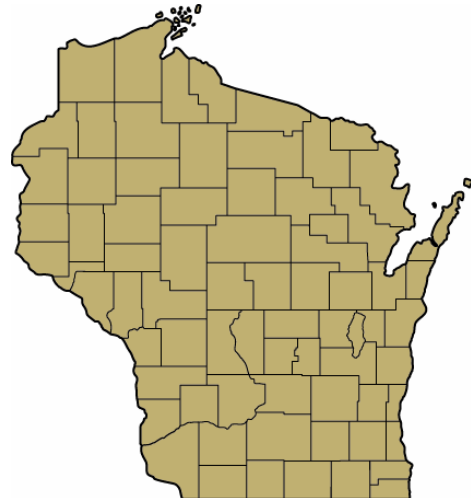
Lakes, streams, rivers, ponds; often far from standing water (the “meadow frog”) during the summer.

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**

*Rana 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:

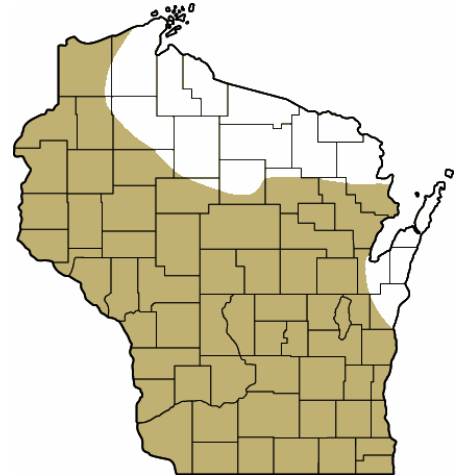
Cool, clear waters of spring-fed lakes, ponds, and streams; adjacent warm water habitats.

Breeding Phenology:

Mid-April through mid-June

Call:

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



---

**EASTERN AMERICAN TOAD**

*Bufo americanus 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:

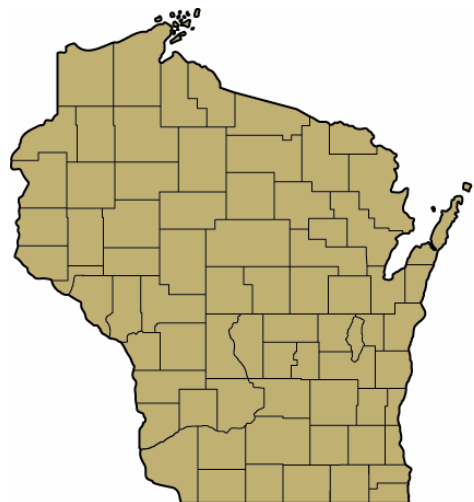
A variety of shallow water habitats.

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:

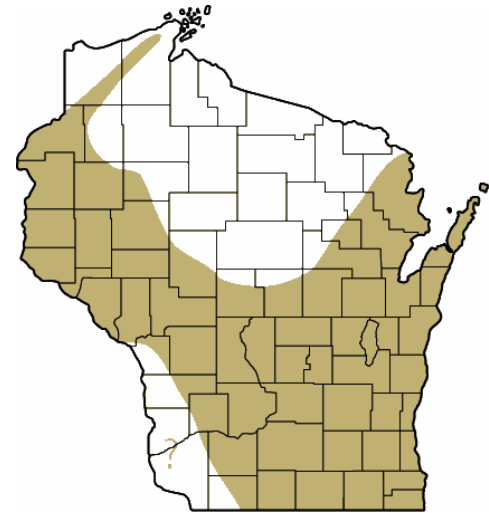
A variety of permanent and semi-permanent bodies of water in open areas and adjacent to wooded areas.

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 crepitans 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:

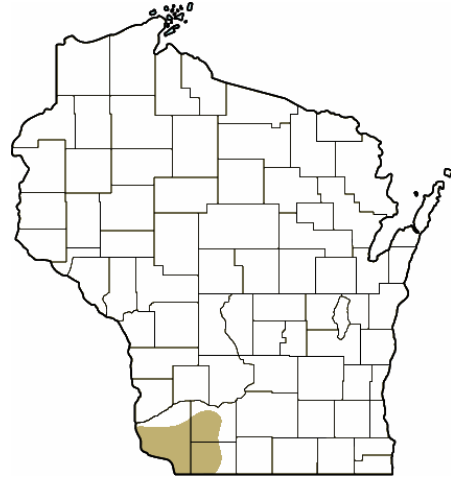
A variety of semi-permanent and permanent bodies of water with submergent and emergent vegetation.

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**

*Rana 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:

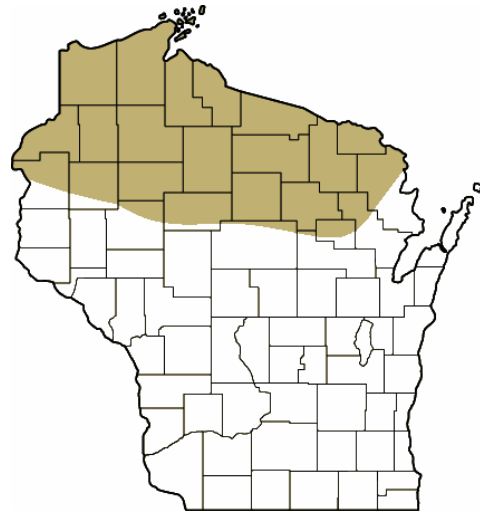
Cool, permanent water with abundant vegetation; often associated with bogs along lakes and streams.

Breeding Phenology:

June through mid-August

Call:

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



**NORTHERN GREEN FROG**

*Rana clamitans melanota*

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:

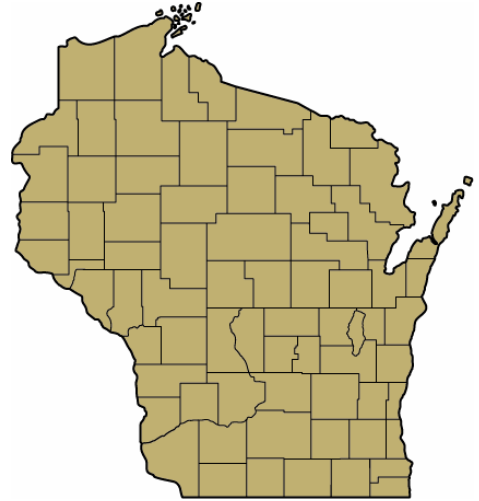
All types of permanent bodies of water.

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**

*Rana catesbeiana*

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”.

