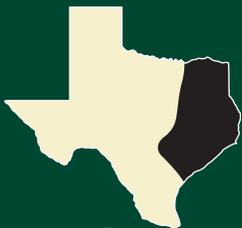


Southern Leopard Frog

Rana sphenocephala



Southern leopard frogs are very adaptable and are comfortable in many habitats—they just need cover and moisture. These frogs are great jumpers, traveling high and far in just a few jumps.

Northern Pineywoods

Southern Leopard Frog

Rana sphenocephala



APPEARANCE

Length: 2 to 3.5 inches (about 5 to 9 cm)

Distinguishing Characteristics

- Color varies from tan to several shades of brown to green.
- *Dorsum* (back) is usually covered with irregular dark brown spots between distinct light colored areas.
- Large dark spots on legs may create the effect of bands.
- Light line along upper jaw
- Light spot on *tympanum* (ear)
- Slender with narrow, pointed head
- Long hind legs and toes
- Males are smaller than females, but with enlarged forearms and thumbs and paired vocal sacs that look like balloons when inflated.

LIFE HISTORY

Range: Eastern United States, from New Jersey east as far as Nebraska and Oklahoma and south into the eastern third of Texas

Diet: Insects and small invertebrates

Predators: Fish, raccoons, skunks and aquatic snakes

Sexual maturity: First spring after hatching

Breeding: In Texas, breeding takes place year round depending on temperature and moisture.

Eggs: Several hundred eggs are laid in a cluster just below the water's surface.

Incubation: Seven to ten days

Young: Newly hatched tadpoles are only about 20 to 25 mm long. They grow to 65 to 70 mm before metamorphosing into frogs, generally between 60 to 90 days.

Life span: 3 years

HABITAT

Southern leopard frogs prefer shallow freshwater areas, but may be seen some distance from water if there is enough vegetation and moisture to provide protection. Southern leopard frogs are also able to live in brackish marshes along the coast.

BEHAVIOR

Southern leopard frogs elude predators by jumping into nearby water and swimming underwater for some distance, while the predator continues looking near the point of entry into the water. They are primarily nocturnal, hiding during the day in vegetation at the water's edge. During wet months, a leopard frog may wander some distance from water, but stays in moist vegetation. They will sometimes wander to colonize.

NOW YOU KNOW!

- The mating call is a series of abrupt, deep croaks, creating a guttural trill. The trill rate may be as many as 13 per second.
- Males call from shore or while floating in shallow water.
- A leopard frog's mottled coloration helps camouflage it.
- Southern leopard frogs are often used for teaching dissecting in science classes.

SOUTHERN LEOPARD FROGS AND PEOPLE

The name of the genus comes from the Latin *rana* (frog). The species name combines the Greek words *sphenos* (wedge-shaped) and *kephale* (head) to describe its triangular head. The mating calls of southern leopard frogs are a familiar background sound to many Texans living near ponds, streams and wetlands. To obtain a tape of the calls of frogs and toads of Texas, contact Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, Wildlife Diversity Branch, 512-912-7011.