



American Bullfrog (*Lithobates/Rana catesbeianus*)

Lith-o-bait-ees cat-es-be-on-us



Description: The American bullfrog is a large, fairly typical ranid frog ranging in size from 5 to 9 inches. Ground color can range from brown to greenish brown, to olive brown, with some turquoise-blue specimens also being known. The dorsal surface may have scattered, dark spots or mottling as well. A major identifying feature of the American bullfrog which distinguishes it from the very similar green frog (*Lithobates/Rana clamitans*), are the absence of dorsolateral skin folds along the dorsum. A tympanic membrane is often visible however.

Taxonomy and Classification:

Life: All living, physical, and animate entities

Domain: Eukaryota

Kingdom: Animalia

Phylum: Chordata/Vertebrata

Class: Amphibia

Order: Anura

Suborder: Neobatrachia

Family: Ranidae

Genus: Rana/Lithobates

Species: *Rana/Lithobates catesbeianus**

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**Taxonomy subject to change and revision.*

Similar/Confusing Species: The green frog (*Lithobates clamitans*) has visible dorsolateral folds, and adults are smaller than bullfrogs. Mink frogs (*Lithobates septentrionalis*) may have absent or inconspicuous dorsolateral folds, give off a musky odor when handled, and are more limited in range to the northern third of Wisconsin. For tadpole/larvae identification, see the following link below:

<http://watermonitoring.uwex.edu/pdf/level1/wepp/TadpoleLarvalSalamanderKeys.pdf>

Etymology: Lithobates- Litho (stone) bates (one that walks, treads, hunts). *catesbeianus*-patronym for Mark Catesby (1682/1683 - 1749), English naturalist and illustrator. Rana-Latin for “frog”.

Sounds/Call: The anurans are perhaps the most audible and vocal of the herptile groups. The American bullfrog’s call is a deep, resonating “Ruum, Ruuum” or “Raaarr Raaarr”. American bullfrogs may also produce other sounds/vocalizations (such as distress, territorial, or rivalry calls), but some rustling and/or plopping into water may also be heard.

Subspecies: None.

Range & Habitat: Occurs statewide, but often has fragmented, localized distribution. May be introduced in some areas. Found in most permanent to semi-permanent bodies of water including lakes, ponds, marshes, slow moving streams and rivers, ditches, and river backwaters.

Habits & Natural History: The American bullfrog is a large, semi aquatic ranid frog that occurs statewide, and may be locally abundant. Their deep, resonating calls can be heard from late spring (May), and into mid-summer (July). American bullfrogs are voracious predators of insects and other invertebrates, as well as smaller amphibians (including their own species) and reptiles. When startled, they will often emit a cat like yelp or piercing “scream” while inflating their bodies by expelling air through their lungs. Because they are voracious, bullfrogs have become invasive in some areas where they have been introduced through various human means.

Phenology: American bullfrogs emerge from overwintering as early as the first warm days of mid to late April or May and begin calling from late May through July. They will remain active throughout the rest of the year through late September or October (or sometimes even later in the year if warmer temperatures persist or otherwise permit).

Conservation Status: WI Special Concern; May have some bag limits and other restrictions depending on county, but regulated by WI DNR. IUCN Red List Least Concern (LC).

Contact

Authored by Eric Roscoe. For any additional questions, comments, and/or concerns regarding this species, group of species, or this informational sheet, please email and contact the Madison Area Herpetological Society at info@madisonherps.org

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