



Northern Leopard Frog (*Lithobates/Rana pipiens*)

Litho-bait-ees pip-ee-ens



Description: A medium sized ranid frog ranging from 2 to 3 ½ inches on average. Skin color can range from green, olive, brown, to brownish green with numerous dark, rounded spots, cross bars, to blotches that tend to be irregularly scattered over the limbs and body. Two prominent light colored dorsolateral folds along the dorsum are also present. The northern leopard frog also lacks the yellow thigh and groinal regions and linear, more rectangular dorsal blotches of the very similar appearing Pickerel frog (*Lithobates/Rana palustris*). A patternless green, brown, to greenish brown “burnsi” phase has also sometimes been found, but is not currently a recognized subspecies.

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

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Species: *Rana/Lithobates pipiens**

*Taxonomy subject to change and revision.

Similar/Confusing Species: Pickerel frogs (*Lithobates palustris*) have more linear, rectangular dorsal blotches and yellow groinal regions. Green frogs (*Lithobates clamitans*) have more scattered, smaller/less conspicuous or absent dorsal spotting. 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). pipiens-pipio (chirp, peep, twitter). Rana-Latin for “frog”.

Sounds/Call: The anurans are perhaps the most audible and vocal of the herptile groups. The northern leopard frog’s call sounds like a low snore, which may be difficult to hear over other frog species. Northern leopard frogs 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: Common and widespread statewide. Found in and along moist, grassy margins of ponds, lakes, rivers, streams, ditches, marshes, and other wetlands. They may stray farther from water and may be found in fields, meadows, and prairies as well.

Habits & Natural History: The northern leopard frog is a fairly widespread ranid frog species in Wisconsin, where they may often be seen or encountered some distance from water. These frogs are strong and wary jumpers, often making them difficult to approach or capture. The northern leopard frog is a fairly early calling species, and begins calling and reproducing from mid to late spring, or from about mid to late April to May in shallow, temporary ponds, ditches, marshes, and other wetlands.

Phenology: Northern leopard frogs are an early emerging ranid frog that emerge from overwintering as early as the first warm days of late March to early April, and begin calling from late March through May. 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, and may be declining in some areas, and regulated by WI DNR. IUCN Red List Least Concern (LC), but in need of updating.

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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