



* Eric Roscoe

Leopard Frogs (*Rana/Lithobates pipiens*), (*Rana/Lithobates blairi*), and (*Rana/Lithobates sphenoccephalus*)

Bold and Athletic Natives

Leopard frogs are relatively small to medium sized ranid frogs that are powerful and active jumpers with pointed snouts, and ground color ranging from green, to tan, light brown, or greenish brown with a series of irregularly shaped and spaced darker spots, blotches, and/or barring along the body and limbs. Dorsolateral ridges are also usually prominent, and lighter colored. There are 14 known species of leopard frogs. However, the Northern Leopard Frog (*Lithobates pipiens*), Southern Leopard Frog (*Lithobates sphenoccephalus*), and Plains Leopard Frog (*Lithobates blairi*) are perhaps the most widely known and kept species.

Taxonomy

Life: All living, physical, and animate entities

Domain: Eukaryota

Kingdom: Animalia

Phylum/Sub Phylum: Chordata/Vertebrata

Class: Amphibia

Order: Anura

Suborder: Neobatrachia

Family: Ranidae

Genus: *Lithobates/Rana*

Species: *Lithobates/Rana pipiens**, *Lithobates/Rana blairi**, and *Lithobates/Rana sphenoccephalus**

*Taxonomy subject to change and revision.

Lifespan and Longevity

If provided the proper care, leopard frogs can attain longevity of at least 5 to 10 years or more in captivity.

Distribution and Habitat

Leopard frogs are widely distributed over much of the United States, southern to southeastern Canada, and northern Mexico depending on the species. They may be found in moist, grassy marshes, fields, meadows, swamp, river, pond, and lake margins, and margins of other wetlands.

Conservation Status

L. pipiens, *L. blairi*, and *L. sphenoccephalus* are IUCN Red List Least Concern (LC).

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Experience Level Required

Novice/Beginner to Intermediate/Moderate.

Size

Most adult leopard frog species range in size from 2 to 4 ½ inches.

Housing and Enclosure

Housing must absolutely be sealed and escape proof with a secured top or aquarium hood. Leopard frogs can be a fairly easy to house species, and can be kept communally when increasingly larger space is provided per frog, and conditions are still monitored, but are very active and powerful jumpers. Tadpoles and young frogs of very similar size can be housed together, housing frogs of disparate sizes together is not advisable. As with other ranid frogs, even leopard frogs can be cannibalistic under the correct conditions, and may even attempt to eat each other if adequate food and other resources are not provided. At minimum, a 30 to 40 gallon enclosure should be used to maintain a single or pair of leopard frogs, although larger quarters are preferred. Glass aquariums or terrariums overall are not the best choices to maintain these large, active frogs in, as they are prone to leaping into the glass and potentially damaging or injuring themselves in the process. If maintained in captivity, visual barricades or opaque walls and sides should be used. A large, sufficiently sized plastic tote or trough or commercially available turtle tub of appropriate size can be used to substitute for aquariums for housing leopard frogs. Leopard frogs are semi aquatic frogs, and require an area or portion of dry land. This can be used by creating a suitable substrate dam in the enclosure consisting of appropriately sized aquarium gravel and/or sand as substrate and Plexiglas using aquarium silicone that cannot be easily ingested by the frogs. A powerful filtration system and canister is also recommended to help maintain water clarity and quality. Without a filtration system, the enclosure must be cleaned and changed at least 50% twice weekly.

Other furnishings to provide can include live or artificial aquatic plants and vegetation for added aesthetics and to assist in maintaining enclosure quality, and hides such as upturned plastic or ceramic plant pots, log or rock hides, driftwood, or similar hides and furnishings. Spot clean daily and clean the enclosure at minimum every 2 to 4 weeks.

Temperature, Lighting, and Humidity

Leopard frogs have fairly simple and undemanding heating and lighting requirements in captivity, and do not require additional UVA/UVB lighting, although providing it in moderated amounts can be greatly beneficial for their health, immune system, and overall wellness. For any supplemental heating that may be needed, use a low wattage incandescent or UVA/UVB bulb, radiant or ceramic heat emitter, or UTH (under tank heating element). Ambient temperatures in an enclosure for these frogs should be within 77 to 85 degrees F, and water temperatures at around 70 to 75 degrees F. More specific lighting, heating, and humidity product suggestions and recommendations that can best suit one's needs, as well as those of one's animals can be given as well.

Feeding, Diet, and Nutrition

Insectivorous to Carnivorous; Leopard frogs can be voracious predators in the wild, and will feed on a variety of insects, arachnids, worms, and other invertebrates. They may also occasionally catch and consume smaller vertebrates as well. These frogs in captivity should be fed 2 to 3 times weekly. They are very sight oriented feeders, and will eat feeder crickets, roaches, earthworms, redworms, bloodworms, or mealworms as well as feeder fish and occasionally pre-killed rodents of appropriate size, although these prey items should be given

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only sparingly. They can also be given many commercially available pelleted diets, or freeze dried foods, but these must be animated.. Do not overfeed these frogs, or obesity and other health issues can become concerns. Feeder insects should be gut loaded by provided them a quality diet containing vitamins and minerals. Gutloading and dusting insects with vitamin D3 and calcium supplements 1 to 2 times weekly for added nutritional value will greatly benefit the health and well-being of these frogs. Feed them using tongs, forceps, or otherwise in the enclosure or in a dish and not by hand, as they can become acclimated enough to mistake a moving hand or finger as food during feeding. More specific dietary and supplementary product suggestions and recommendations that can best suit one's needs, as well as those of one's animals can be given as well.

Handling

Leopard frogs are active and powerful jumpers that, as with most amphibians, do not tolerate excessive handling as a general rule. As with many frogs and other amphibians, they have smooth, moist, permeable skin that can be susceptible to desiccation (drying out) or direct and indirect contact with any chemicals, oils, or lotions that may be present on human hands. If leopard frogs are to be handled or restrained, there are a few techniques and methods to do so for semi aquatic ranid frogs including cradling (which involves holding the belly with the hand's palm with the frog's head towards the wrist and index finger between the hind legs) and the thigh hold (firmly grasping the legs about the knee joints to prevent jumping). Leopard frogs are typically not aggressive or prone to biting, but can be skittish or prone to jumping (particularly wild caught frogs).

Also be sure to practice basic cleanliness and hygiene associated with proper husbandry after touching or handling any animals or animal enclosures to prevent the possibility of contracting salmonellosis or any other zoonotic pathogens

Contact

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

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