

Wood Frog

Rana sylvatica



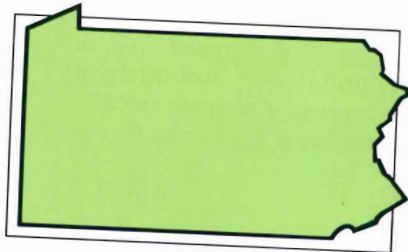
General characteristics. The wood frog is primarily a diurnal amphibian; that is, the frog is most active during the day. Even so, due to its secretive and solitary nature and natural camouflage, it seldom is seen other than during the breeding season. This medium-sized frog's average adult length is $1\frac{3}{8}$ to $2\frac{3}{4}$ inches.

More terrestrial than a lot of other frogs, the wood frog is also capable of jumping farther than most. In addition, when fleeing from danger it is able to turn itself around as it hits the ground to face a startled enemy eyeball to eyeball. Thus prepared, it can take other evasive measures, if necessary.

Identification. The body of the wood frog appears more flat than most other frogs. The head is broad, but ends in a pointed snout. Its skin is relatively smooth and moist to the touch. Although usually a shade of tan, the body also can be pinkish to an occasional dark brown. An important identifying mark is a prominent, dark mask that covers each eye and extends along the side of the head to just behind the eardrum (tympanum). A light line or stripe marks the edge of the upper lip. The chest is marked with a dark spot located near the base of the forelimbs. The white belly sometimes is mottled with darker pigment.

In some specimens, dark bars break up the tan color of the legs, which on the undersides are yellow-white to greenish white. The toes are webbed, but only slightly. The dorsolateral ridges are distinctly evident and extend all the way to the groin. They are a lighter shade than the rest of the body. The wood frog has protruding large eyes, bigger than the tympanum. The gold iris of each eye is darker on its lower half than on the upper half.

Range. The wood frog can find suitable habitat throughout the entire state. This frog is quite adaptable—it is found north of the Arctic Circle, the only North American frog residing in this frosty environment. It ranges across Canada to Alaska in the north and in its eastern range as far south as the southern Appalachians.



Habitat. A terrestrial animal, it ranges far from water during the summer months. It likes shade and moisture, so damp woodlands are a favorite haunt of the wood frog. Well-camouflaged against the dead leaves littering the forest floor, the wood frog spends much of its time here, unnoticed and alone. Although a strong swimmer and able to produce a vigorous kick with its hind legs, the wood frog spends little time in the water except when it breeds. As winter settles over its wooded home, the wood frog burrows beneath the forest debris to hibernate among the leaves or in the soil beneath moss-covered logs.

Reproduction. Along with the leopard frog, the wood frog is among the first to mate and breed. Warm rains are needed to entice the wood frog from hibernation and when the air temperatures reach 50 degrees, the male begins to call his mate. Often, the first singing is heard even before the winter's coating of ice has completely melted from the breeding pond. The male wood frog begins to call as early as February or March. The male greets the female in a day or two and the eggs are quickly deposited by the female and fertilized by the male. The eggs usually are laid in slow-moving pools of streams or small ponds. In the event of a late freeze, the eggs do not die but simply await warmer temperatures to develop. Before releasing the eggs, the mated wood frogs swim close to shore where the water is shallow and warmest. They choose an area with a profuse stand of submerged vegetation, and these stems, branches and shoots receive the globular egg masses as they are deposited. The black eggs are encased in a clear jelly mass that adheres to the plants just below the surface. The wood frog lays between 2,000 and 3,000 eggs and then quickly leaves the breeding site. After being in the water for a little more than a week, the egg masses begin to flatten, float upward to the surface and spread out, looking much like the familiar green scum often found on ponds.

The eggs at this point take less than a month to hatch. The tadpoles leaving the tiny eggs are greenish olive and have high tail crests (See Figure III-17). They remain in the tadpole, or larval, stage for about two months.

Call. Only the male wood frog calls and he may do so while floating on the open surface of the mating pond. The song is heard early in the breeding season, about the only time the wood frog vocalizes. The call consists of a series of short, raspy duck-like quacks, each about one second in duration. At times, the wood frog may produce a clacking noise, but it always sounds hoarse. The call of the wood frog is not heard over great distances.

Food. The moist forest home preferred by the wood frog provides a varied menu. This amphibian of the woods preys on numerous insects and other small invertebrates.

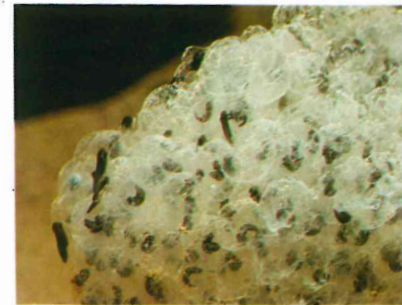


Figure III-17

The high tail crests, typical of wood frog tadpoles, are not yet apparent on these larvae just emerging from the egg mass.