

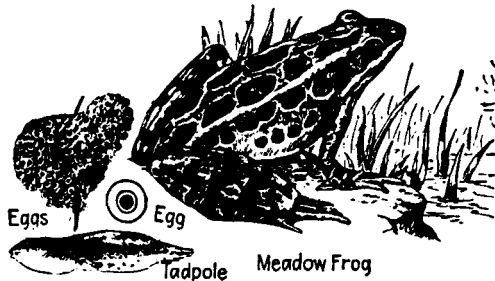
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Natural History Notes

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THE LEOPARD FROG



Rana pipiens, the leopard frog, is the most common frog in North America this side of the Rocky Mountains. Its range extends from Canada to Mexico and from the east coast to the Rockies. The leopard frog is also known as the meadow, common, water and spotted frog. It is found in most any sort of habitat, even at great distances from water in the latter part of the season. Generally, however, it can be found near any body of water including well houses and low-lying marshes. The leopard frog has also been found as high as 10,000 feet above sea level. As one of its common names suggests, it may frequently be found in meadows. It is a wide-ranging species and probably the most cold hardy of all frogs.

Rana pipiens is a very pretty frog, as frogs go. Your basic leopard frog is a green, gray or brown with shades of these colors ranging from a dull to an almost metallic hue. It has sharply defined, light bordered irregular dark spots. These may be merely a light speckling or at times non-existent. The underside is white to yellowish in color. The leopard frog is long and slender with a rather pointed nose and head. It has two conspicuous ridges running the length of its body and extending onto its legs. The upper lip, which overlaps the lower, has a pale stripe on it. It has smooth, slippery skin. The hind feet have extensive webbing. The eye has a wide gold iris with a horizontal black pupil. The average size of this frog is 3-4" with the female being somewhat larger. The leopard frog has relatively long slender legs about half its total length. It is a remarkable jumper and when trying to avoid

capture it will jump in a long, low, zig-zag fashion. It will even out-jump its much larger relative, the bullfrog.

Economically, the leopard frog is important as fish bait and as laboratory dissection specimens, commonly used in biology classes. The hind legs, as are the bullfrog's, are edible. The male may be used for human pregnancy testing.

These common frogs are among the first to emerge from hibernation each spring. In late March to late April, depending on weather conditions, the leopard frog appears and immediately starts the mating process. The males will congregate in or around a body of water and will start to vocalize in an attempt to attract gravid females. These vocalizations can best be described as a gruff snoring call lasting several seconds, followed by several clucks or chuckles. Females also vocalize, but not as intensely as males. Individually, one leopard frog doesn't make a whole lot of noise, but taken en masse they can create quite a din.

During mating the eggs are fertilized and deposited in shallow water either directly on the substrate or attached to submergent vegetation. Eggs are laid in masses or rafts of 5,000 - 10,000 eggs. The entire raft is longer and wider than it is thick. Within two to four weeks, again depending on weather conditions, the tadpoles will have all hatched out. During this time they are extremely vulnerable to predators. Later in the summer the tadpole begins to metamorphose into the adult frog. First the hind legs appear, then the front legs and finally the tail is absorbed.

Adult leopard frogs feed on small insects and spiders and worms. Their diet is limited to whatever is nearby that is the appropriate size. The frog moves slowly around an area and waits for food to appear. It has a sticky tongue which shoots out to grab the food. The cricket or beetle is held by teeth present only in the frog's upper jaw and then is swallowed whole.

Come the end of summer, the leopard frog will react to the change in temperature and go into hibernation, usually at the bottom of a pool or marsh. In the spring the leopard frog will again emerge to begin the process all over again.