

# Florida Leopard Frog

*Rana spenocephala spenocephalus (Rana utricularia)*

Southern Leopard Frogs are large, slender frogs, growing up to five inches long.

The back is greenish-tan to brown, with obvious raised ridges down each side of the body and marked with plentiful, obvious dark spots. Two lines run lengthwise on each side from the head to the rear legs.

The eardrum (tympanum) is marked with a distinctive light dot in the center and the snout is distinctly pointed. A yellowish stripe runs the length of the body and through the eye, and the top part of the eye is the same color as the stripe. Like all “true frogs,” they have large eardrums and webbed hind feet.

Their call sounds similar to chicken clucks or a finger rubbing hard across an inflated balloon. To hear frog calls, visit [www.pwrc.usgs.gov/Frogquiz/](http://www.pwrc.usgs.gov/Frogquiz/), click on “frog call lookup” at the top of the page, and select the species from the common name drop-down list.

Southern Leopard Frogs are broadly distributed throughout the southeastern United States and are not considered a species of conservation concern by any state or the Federal Government.

A subspecies, the Florida Leopard Frog, is common throughout Florida with the exception of the northern Keys in virtually any shallow freshwater habitat (sometimes even brackish), hardwood forests, and pine flatwoods.

They breed in shallow wetlands, including floodplain and bottomland swamps, marshes, ponds (natural or man-made), lakes, canals, and ditches.

Leopard frogs are most active at night. During the day, they hide among plants on the shore or occasionally on the tops of fallen and mostly submerged tree trunks.



When frightened and when adjacent to water, Southern Leopard Frogs will dive into the water, make a sharp angled turn while submerged, and surface among vegetation away from the predator’s gaze.

When frightened on land, they make a series of low leaps, each in a different direction. They are capable of leaping lengths of three to four feet in a single jump.

Reproduction is aquatic and fertilization is external. In Florida, mating can occur throughout the year. Males make an advertisement call while floating on open water, from vegetation, or while sitting on logs or sticks.

In the South there are usually two primary breeding periods, the first in early fall in September–October and the second from November–February or March.

Female frogs will lay egg masses of up to 4,000 eggs in shallow water. Eggs are found most often attached to the stems of submerged or emergent vegetation.

Eggs hatch in four to five days in Florida. Eggs may exhibit accelerated hatching times in the presence of crayfish which prey on the eggs.

Newly-hatched tadpoles are around 1/4 inch in length. They eventually reach a length of about 2-1/2 inches before transformation.

The entire tadpole stage of life is usually around 90 days. When metamorphosis is imminent, the tadpole’s tail bears dark spots.

Tadpoles eat algae and other small organisms in the water, including small insect larvae.

They will transform to adult frogs by late spring or early summer. Southern Leopard Frog tadpoles can shorten their time as larvae

in response to wetlands drying up.

After mating, adult frogs become more terrestrial and wander away from the water into upland habitats such as damp woods or fields where they hide among plants or under logs. They feed during the summer when vegetation in pastures, fields, and sod lands affords shade and shelter. As summer ends, frogs return to the water.

Adult Southern Leopard Frogs are predators and eat a wide variety of prey including crayfish, spiders, centipedes, and many types of insects including mosquitoes.

Southern Leopard Frogs are generally too small for their legs to be eaten in restaurants, but they are captured in large numbers for use in the bait industry, by scientific researchers, and for classroom teaching/dissection.

Southern Leopard Frogs, along with Southern Cricket Frogs (*Acris gryllus*), are an important food item in the diet of many aquatic predators including Great Blue Herons, grackles, Banded Water Snakes, Peninsula Ribbon Snakes, Water Moccasins, River Otters, large fish, and turtles. Additional predators include Raccoons and Opossums.

Tadpoles and eggs are especially vulnerable and may be eaten by insects, turtles, leeches, fish, salamanders, or crayfish.