

Boreal Chorus Frog (*Pseudacris maculata*)

Family Hylidae

Subspecies: None currently recognized

Updated 2025



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Description/Identification: Formerly the Western Chorus Frog in Wisconsin (*Pseudacris triseriata*), the Boreal Chorus Frog is a small hylid treefrog ranging in adult size from about 0.78 to 1.18 inches. The webbing on the hind toes is not expanded, and the discs on the ends of each of the toe pads are only slightly expanded, and the fourth toes long. The dorsal skin is moist, and somewhat granular to warty, and the ventral surface is more granular. Males and females appear similar, except during the breeding season when males develop a more visible subgular vocal sac. Inside the mouth, Boreal Chorus Frogs and other hylid frogs have only very small, nonpedicellate (or incomplete) teeth on the maxilla and premaxillae weakly attached to the bone, which in many cases, are only calcified at their tips. Their teeth are perhaps most visible only through a high magnification electron microscope. Also inside the front of the mouths of most anurans, Boreal Chorus Frogs included, is a projectile-like tongue made of extremely soft tissue, and which uses reverse adhesion and soft, viscoelastic properties coupled with non-Newtonian saliva.

Dorsal ground coloration and pattern can be variable, ranging from light gray, buff, or dark brown with three darker brown or green stripes extending from the base of the head along the total length of the body. In some individuals, these stripes may be broken or absent. A narrow, dark stripe also runs from the nostrils, through each eye, above the forelimbs, and to the groin. Beneath this stripe is a lighter stripe extending the upper length of the lip, and the throat or vocal sac is yellowish. The ventral, or undersurface is white, and the limbs have dark spots or transverse bars or banding.

The tadpoles, from hatching to development, ranging in size from 7 to 10 mm, up to 25 to 30 mm., and the body is medium sized. The tails are of medium length with a low fin, eyes set dorsolaterally, and the mouth and jaws have 2 upper and 3 (or sometimes 2) lower labial tooth rows. The lateral margins of the papillary border of the mouth are not folded towards the head. Tadpoles in general range from dark brown to grayish on the dorsum, but with development become more mottled or brassy, and the undersides are bronze. The fins are clear with darker flecking, and the upper-half of the tail musculature is darker than the lower half.

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Tadpole. © iNaturalist.

Wisconsin's Gray Treefrog species (*Dryophytes versicolor*) and (*Dryophytes chrysoscelis*) are larger, and have more well-defined toe-pads. Spring Peepers (*Pseudacris crucifer*) usually have a large, imperfect "X" pattern on their dorsums. Blanchard's Cricket Frogs (*Acris blanchardi*) have much wartier skin. No subspecies are currently recognized, although the Boreal Chorus Frog was formerly a subspecies of the Western Chorus Frog. Wood Frogs (*Lithobates sylvaticus*) are larger in size, have prominent dorsolateral folds, and lack the (usually) three broken or complete dorsal stripes.



© WDNR.

Link to Audio/Call: [Boreal Chorus Frog \(*Pseudacris maculata*\) \(youtube.com\)](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=...)

Range and Distribution: Boreal Chorus Frogs range in Canada as far north as the Northwest Territories, through extreme eastern British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Ontario, and Quebec, and south into the United States south to extreme northern Oklahoma and Arkansas, and west to eastern Arizona, New Mexico, and Idaho. In much of Indiana, Ohio, and lower Michigan, they become the Western Chorus Frog (*Pseudacris triseriata*). In Wisconsin, Chorus Frogs can be found throughout much of the state, except the northeast portion.

Habitat: Chorus Frogs can be found in a variety of wet to moist habitats. Moist fields or prairies, marshes, riverbottom forests and woodlands, woodland ponds, prairie or forest pothole or kettle ponds may all be inhabited by Chorus Frogs. During the non-breeding season in the summer, they may live in moist, semi-open areas but not necessarily close to water, including suburban areas and vacant lots, where they may be found under moist ground cover or debris.

Feeding and Diet: Chorus Frogs are insectivorous, and will eat a wide variety of tiny insects, insect larvae, arachnids, and other invertebrates. The tadpoles feed mainly on algae, although metamorphosing tadpoles may not feed at all.

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Natural History and Calls: Chorus Frogs are one of the first and earliest frogs to begin calling in the spring, from early or mid-March through early June when they are awakened by the early spring thawing. They are one of the most frequently heard frogs, but also one of the least frequently seen due to their small sizes and calling locations. Males will call from partially submerged twigs or from and within grasses or other partially submerged vegetation, and will cease calling when approached too closely, making them very difficult to visually locate. Males arrive to their breeding ponds one to two weeks earlier than females.

Calling may last through early June, although the majority of Chorus Frog breeding takes place in late April and early May. Eggs are laid in small cylindrical masses, 20 to 100 or more in number, around submerged grass stems, twigs, or other vegetation partially submerged beneath the water. Tadpoles will then hatch anywhere from about 6 to 18 days, and fully transform and metamorphosize one and a half to two months later. Their calls, which can sometimes become very loud in large numbers or in large choruses, sound like a “cree-eeek” “cree-eeek”..., or similar in pitch and sound to a fingernail being racked across a comb. These frogs, as previously mentioned, can be very wary, and will cease calling when disturbed. They often call from underneath vegetation or underwater, which amplifies and throws their calls, making them very difficult to visually locate.

Once breeding is complete, Chorus Frogs disperse for the rest of the summer, and may remain near their wetland breeding habitats, or stray further from water, where they forage for food and seek refuge. Chorus Frogs will also climb amongst low plants or shrubs to forage as well. Chorus Frogs may also call in the fall in late September, October, or November but do not breed during these times; as the barometric pressure changes during these times of year are similar to spring, which may induce them to call.



Western Chorus Frog Ventral/Belly View (but identical to Boreal Chorus Frog).

© PsychoticNature.

Chorus Frogs overwinter near their breeding ponds or wetlands underneath rocks, logs, or other vegetation, or underground. Chorus Frogs are also able to tolerate urbanization, and do not seem to be significantly affected by it. Like spring peepers, and other very early spring breeding frogs, Chorus Frogs are able to conserve energy and hormonal levels from the year prior, giving them the advantage of being ready to breed almost instantly upon the emergence of spring the following year. Also as with some other frogs, Chorus Frogs possess somewhat of a natural antifreeze property to their blood cells, enabling them to freeze nearly completely solid without harmful effects, and be able to quickly thaw again early in the spring.

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Natural predators of Boreal Chorus Frogs and their tadpoles can include a variety of large, carnivorous or predatory aquatic insects and/or insect larvae such as water bugs and water beetles, dragonfly larvae, and large spiders, as well as turtles, fish, other frogs and/or amphibian larvae, snakes, a wide array of birds, and many different small to medium sized carnivorous mammals including opossums, skunks, raccoons, shrews, weasels, mink, foxes, and other mammals.

Conservation Status: In Wisconsin, Boreal Chorus Frogs are listed as “Common”. They are still regulated and protected along with all other of Wisconsin’s herptiles, however under N.R. 16. Boreal Chorus Frogs are currently not protected or regulated federally. Boreal Chorus Frogs are currently IUCN Red-List Least Concern (LC).