

Mink Frog (*Lithobates septentrionalis*)

Family Ranidae

Subspecies: None currently recognized

Updated 2025



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Description/Identification: Mink Frogs are a somewhat small to medium sized ranid frog ranging in adult size from about 1.9 to 2.5 inches snout-to-vent length. The fore feet are not webbed, but the hind feet are strongly webbed, with the toe webbing extending to the last joint of the fourth toe, and to the tip of the fifth toe. The skin is generally moist, and smooth, and is said to smell musky (hence the name Mink Frog). Males and females are dimorphic in size; males have tympanic membranes that are larger than the eyes, and enlarged forelimbs and inner-thumbs on their digits used for clasping females during amplexus, while the tympanic membranes of females are smaller, or equal to the size of the eyes. No subspecies of Mink Frogs are currently recognized. Inside the mouth, Mink Frogs and other ranid 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, Mink 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.

The dorsolateral folds, or ridges along the backs of Mink Frogs may be broken up or incomplete, or absent, but rarely complete, and are about the same color as the rest of the body colors. Dorsal color usually ranges from green, brown, or greenish-brown, with the dorsum and sides having darker brown or reddish-brown circular spots, reticulation patterns, or other large dark irregular patches, circuli, or dorsal markings. The limbs are usually a dark mottled brown with darker spots, blotches or patches. The labials along the upper jaw, lips, and sides of the head are usually bright green with no markings. The underside or ventral surface of Mink Frogs are solid white or yellowish with some darker grayish mottling, particularly towards the hind legs.



Tadpole. © NatureNorth.com

Mink Frog tadpoles range from about 8 to 10 mm. upon hatching, and are about 25 to 35 mm. upon transformation into adult frogs. The dorsal color of the tadpoles can range from emerald green, or

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yellowish-green with darker brown spots or mottling. The undersides are whitish to brighter yellow, and tail fins often have a reddish tinge not extending much further than the ends of the hind limbs. The tadpoles have about 1 ½ tooth rows on their upper jaws, and 3 complete rows beneath.



© WDNR.

Link to Audio/Call: [Mink Frog \(*Lithobates septentrionalis*\) \(youtube.com\)](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=...)

Range and Distribution: Mink Frogs are a northern-ranging species, occurring from southern and southeastern Ontario, Quebec, Labrador, New Brunswick, and Nova Scotia, Canada, into the New England/Northeastern and Upper Midwestern United States into northern Minnesota and Wisconsin. In Wisconsin, Mink Frogs are found predominately in the northern third of the state.

Habitat: Mink Frogs occur primarily in northern wetland habitats. They may be found in and near sphagnum bogs or marshes, ponds, shallow margins of lakes, and rivers or streams with ample aquatic, submerged vegetation in the form of sphagnum moss, water lilies, or other emergent aquatic plants and vegetation throughout the spring and summer. Some studies and research have also found differences in diets and feeding locations between North American Bullfrogs, North American Green Frogs, and Mink Frogs, occupying different habitats or areas of wetlands.



Ventral/Belly View. © Vermont Reptile and Amphibian Atlas.

Feeding and Diet: Mink Frogs are primarily insectivorous, feeding on a variety of aquatic insects and insect larvae, small mollusks such as snails, worms, small crustaceans, and other aquatic invertebrates found away from the shorelines. The tadpoles are primarily herbivorous, feeding on algae and other bottom debris, although both tadpoles and adults may eat other amphibian eggs and larvae occasionally.

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Natural History: Mink Frogs begin to emerge and will start calling in early June, lasting through early to mid-July, making them one of the later calling frogs in the year along with North American Bullfrogs and North American Green Frogs. The Mink Frog's distinctive call sounds like a horse's hooves trotting on a cobblestone road or pavement, and sounds like a "knock-knock-knock", or a "kuk-kuk-kuk". They usually will call away from the shoreline while floating in water anywhere from 1 to 2 meters in depth, from sphagnum moss mats, aquatic lilies, and other submergent aquatic vegetation. The eggs are then laid in large, loose, globular masses in numbers of 2,000 to 4,000 or more, oftentimes fastened to aquatic vegetation under the water's surface for a meter or more.

Once hatched, and due to the lateness of breeding, Mink Frog tadpoles may often overwinter as tadpoles, and begin their transformations the following year or sometimes even two years. When approached too closely, Mink Frogs will cease calling and leap into or under water, seeking refuge at or near the bottom. They may also emit a startling distress call when threatened. Mink Frogs also may secrete a foul-smelling and distasteful substance from their skin which is said to be toxic to other amphibian species. Mink Frogs tend to be highly aquatic, never venturing far from the water after breeding throughout the year. They rest and feed on and near sphagnum mats or other vegetation, but will shoot across the water's surface in a series of short jumps or bursts while emitting their distress call when threatened.

Mink Frogs superficially resemble North American Green Frogs (*Lithobates clamitans*) or young North American Bullfrogs (*Lithobates catesbeianus*) in appearance, and can often be confused with one another. North American Green Frogs, however, tend to have more strongly defined dorsolateral ridges or folds, and North American Bullfrogs lack any distinct dorsolateral folds. Both North American Green Frogs and North American Bullfrogs also tend to be larger than Mink Frogs in size, and both also usually tend to have fewer dark, irregular dorsal markings. Mink Frogs remain active throughout the year until September or October, where they will then overwinter buried in the bottom sediment or substrate, in the river, pond, or stream beds or banks, or simply entering a state of torpor at the bottoms of their ponds and other wetlands.

Natural predators of Mink 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, weasels, mink, foxes, and other mammals. Other large wading birds such as herons will also readily eat Mink Frogs.

Conservation Status: In Wisconsin, Mink Frogs are listed as a "Special Concern" species. They are still regulated and protected along with all other of Wisconsin's herptiles, however under N.R 16. Mink Frogs are currently not protected or regulated federally. Mink Frogs are currently IUCN Red-List Least Concern (LC).