

North American Green Frog (*Lithobates clamitans*)

Family Ranidae

Subspecies: None currently recognized

Updated 2025



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Description/Identification: The North American Green Frog is a medium-sized to large ranid frog, ranging from about 2.3 to 3.5 inches in snout-to vent length. The skin is moist, and smooth to somewhat finely granular, and the fore-feet are not webbed. The hind feet are strongly webbed to the tips of the toes, and the dorsolateral folds or ridges are very prominent down the back. These dorsolateral ridges extend only to the middle of the back or groin, and are about the same color as the rest of the body's dorsum color. The head and snout are fairly large and broad, but are less rounded and blunt than in Bullfrogs. No subspecies of North American Green Frogs are currently recognized, although previously, the Northern Green Frog (*L. clamitans melanota*) would have been the recognized subspecies otherwise, in Wisconsin. Inside the mouth, North American Green 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, North American Green 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 tympanum and tympanic membranes are also large and distinctive, and are located behind the eyes. Males have much larger tympanic membranes than the eyes, while in female North American Green Frogs, the tympanic membrane is smaller than, or about equal to the size of the eyes. The chin, throat, and chests of males also develop a more yellow coloration during the breeding season, while in females, are white mottled in gray. The ventral, or undersides of North American Green Frogs are generally white or whitish with darker gray reticulations.

Dorsum coloration of North American Green Frogs can be highly variable. They may vary in color from dark to light brown, olive green, bright emerald green, yellow-green, or bluish-green. The snout, upper lips, and head may be brighter green in color than the rest of the body, and there are dark flecks along the upper margins of the lips. The dorsums of North American Green Frogs also often may have smaller, somewhat obscured dark spots or flecks, the limbs barred or reticulated in dark brown markings. Younger to sub-adult North American Green Frogs may be more vividly patterned than adults, both ventrally and dorsally.

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Tadpole. © VA Herpetological Society.

The tadpoles are medium to large sized, ranging from 10 to 12 mm upon hatching, and about 60 to 80 mm upon transformation. The bodies of the tadpoles are fat-bodied with long tails and moderately high tail fins which are heavily spotted or mottled. The anal opening is lateral to the ventral tail fin, and the eyes are dorsolateral. The papillary border of the mouth is folded inward towards the corners, and there are 1 to 2 upper, and 3 lower labial tooth rows. Dorsal coloration of the tadpoles ranges from light brown to olive-green with dark flecks, and the undersides white or pale colored with slight grayish mottling. There are no viscera visible.



© WDNR.

Link to Audio/Call: [Northern Green Frog \(*Lithobates clamitans melanota*\) \(youtube.com\)](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=...)

Range and Distribution: North American Green Frogs have a broad range over much of southern and southeastern Canada, from southern portions of Ontario, Quebec, and Nova Scotia and Newfoundland, south through the New England States, Eastern U.S., and as far west in the U.S. as eastern Texas and Oklahoma. They also extend into Florida, but are absent from the Florida peninsula. In Wisconsin, North American Green Frogs can be found statewide.

Habitat: North American Green Frogs are aquatic to semi-aquatic habitat generalists, and may be found in or near most types of permanent or semi-permanent bodies of water. They may occupy ponds, shallow areas of lakes, marshes, swamps, bogs, springs and spring-fed wetlands, wetland ridges and swales, creeks and streams, roadside ditches, river backwater sloughs and floodplain wetlands, rivers, and almost any other type of similar habitat. The only environments not usually inhabited by North American Green Frogs are more densely closed or forested wetlands.

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Ventral/Belly View. © Jeromi Hefner.

Feeding and Diet: Adult North American Green Frogs are primarily insectivorous to carnivorous, and will feed on a variety of arboreal, terrestrial, or aquatic insects, insect larvae, arachnids, earthworms and other worms, snails, slugs, and other mollusks, crustaceans such as small crayfish, or other arthropods and other invertebrates. The later stages in tadpoles may not feed, although the tadpoles generally are more herbivorous than adults, eating algae and other bottom detritus. Other amphibians and their eggs or larvae may also be eaten by North American Green Frogs, although rarely.

Natural History and Calls: North American Green Frogs are probably the most common and ubiquitous ranid frogs in Wisconsin. They may emerge and become active as early as mid to late April, but do not usually begin calling or breeding until Mid-May through early July. North American Green Frogs are among the latest calling frogs to call in the year, along with Bullfrogs. Their calls, which are made from the edges or periphery of their ponds and wetlands, sounds like a “gunk-gunk”, and are often equated to sounding like that of a banjo string being plucked. Calling and breeding can occur both day and night. The egg masses are similar to those of Bullfrogs, containing as many as 1,000 to 4,000 eggs laid in clumps or gelatinous masses near the surface of the water.

North American Green Frog tadpoles will begin transformation into adult frogs in about 70 to 85 days, and eggs that are generally laid in May transform by August. However, eggs which hatch after July may overwinter as tadpoles, and transform the following year. North American Green Frogs are territorial during their breeding season, and may also issue a lower guttural growl or warning call when other calls approach too closely. This may be given in 3 or 4 times in succession following their normal calls. After breeding, North American Green Frogs remain in and near the periphery of the water throughout the summer and rest of the year, but will disperse along these habitats. Younger or newly metamorph frogs are usually the ones which may travel or migrate further away from the water during the summer in search of new habitats.

North American Green Frogs are commonly confused with North American Bullfrogs (*Lithobates catesbeianus*). However, adult North American Green Frogs are usually smaller than adult North American Bullfrogs, and have less rounded heads and snouts when compared to North American Bullfrogs. The most significant difference are the presence of dorsolateral ridges, which North American Bullfrogs lack. In northern ranges, North American Green Frogs can also strongly resemble Mink Frogs (*Lithobates septentrionalis*), perhaps as an active form of mimicry, giving the Mink Frogs’ foul smelling and bad tasting skin secretions emitted during defense. A North American Green Frog’s primary means

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of defense are their strong leaping abilities, leaping into the water and submerging themselves at the bottom when threatened. North American Green Frogs, however, will very seldom emit a distress vocal call unlike Bullfrogs. Northern Leopard Frogs (*Lithobates pipiens*) have larger, darker dorsal spots and bars, and more prominent lightly colored dorsolateral ridges.

North American Green Frogs remain active throughout the year until October or November, before they overwinter buried amongst the wetland bottom substrate, in river, pond, or lake beds or banks, or they may simply enter a state of torpor at the bottoms of their wetlands.

Natural predators of North American Green 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 North American Green Frogs.

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