

# Spring Peeper (*Pseudacris crucifer*)

Family *Hylidae*

Subspecies: None currently recognized

Updated 2025



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**Description/Identification:** Spring Peepers are small species of treefrogs with slightly enlarged toe pads or discs at the ends of each of their digits. They may range in size from about 0.78 to 0.94 inches in size, with males and females both being similar in appearance, except during the breeding season when males develop more pronounced subgular vocal sacs or pouches. The dorsal skin is smooth or very finely granular, and the ventral or underside is slightly more granular. The fore feet are not webbed, while the hind feet are partially webbed. Inside the mouth, Spring Peepers 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, Spring Peepers 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 dorsal ground color can be variable, from light tan, gray, golden-yellow, yellow-orange, or dark brown. On the dorsum surface is usually a large, perfect to imperfect, darker “X”-shaped pattern, which may be broken or have extra barring. On some specimens, this distinctive dorsal pattern may be absent or obscured. The upper fore and hind limbs also have dark cross barring or banding, and the ventral undersurface ranges from a lighter whitish to pinkish. The underside of the vocal throat sac is darker, and a dark brown or black stripe may also run from each side of the head from the snout through to behind the eye.



Tadpole. UCSWetlands.org

No subspecies are currently recognized. The tadpoles, upon hatching, are about 8 to 10 mm. in size, and reach up to 24 to 32 mm before development. They possess two upper, and two or three lower labial tooth rows, with the third row being one third or less the length of the second row. The dorsal color of the tadpoles can range from light brown to dark green with metallic coppery flecking, the undersides are iridescent, and the tail musculature is light and uniformly pigmented. The tail fins are clear, with light violet bordering. Wisconsin’s Gray Treefrog species (*Dryophytes versicolor*) and (*Dryophytes chrysoscelis*) are larger in size, and have more well-developed toe-pads. Blanchard’s Cricket Frogs (*Acris blanchardi*) are more wartier-skinned, and Boreal Chorus Frogs (*Pseudacris maculata*) lack the large, imperfect “X”

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pattern on the backs.



© WDNR.

Link to Audio/Call: [Spring Peeper \(\*Pseudacris crucifer\*\) \(youtube.com\)](#)

**Range and Distribution:** Spring Peepers have a large and broad ranging, ranging from over much of eastern Canada (Manitoba, Ontario, Quebec, and New Brunswick, south throughout much of the eastern United States to eastern Texas, throughout the Northeast/New England states, and south to the panhandle of Florida. In Wisconsin, Spring Peepers occur throughout the state.

**Habitat:** Spring Peepers may live and breed in a variety of semi-open to forested habitats. These can include marshes or marshy areas, forested or partially forested swamps, roadside ditches, temporary to permanent kettle, pothole, or ephemeral ponds and wetlands, woodlots, and river-bottom or floodplain wetlands. Spring Peepers are most abundant in wooded or forested habitats with suitable breeding ponds and wetlands.



*Ventral/Belly View. © Hilton Pond Center for Piedmont Natural History.*

**Feeding and Diet:** Spring Peepers are insectivorous, feeding on a wide variety of tiny insects, insect larvae, arachnids, small worms, and other arthropods and invertebrates living in and amongst the forest floor or ground debris. The tadpoles feed on algae, phytoplankton, and bottom detritus.

**Natural History and Calls:** Spring Peepers are among the first and earliest species of frogs to begin calling in the spring, shortly after the warm spring thaws and ice melts, and first warm spring rains. They may be observed traveling towards their breeding ponds and wetlands during this time, crossing roads, sidewalks, and other open areas. They may emerge and begin calling from as early as mid to late March, through April, May, and early June. Spring Peepers may call from a variety of locations above or beneath vegetation, partially submerged from beneath the water surface, or from more elevated surfaces such as

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blades of grass, logs, twigs, or tree branches as high as one meter or more from the water surface. Their small sizes, ability to call from a number of locations, and ability to throw their calls often make Spring Peepers very difficult to visually locate.

When disturbed, Spring Peepers will quickly cease calling or leap into more heavily vegetated areas for cover, making them difficult to locate. When calling, their throat sacs may inflate to nearly as large as the frogs themselves, and large numbers or choruses of Spring Peepers can become very loud and deafening. Spring Peepers will then lay as many as 800 to 1,000 small whitish eggs singly or in clusters of 2 or 3 attached to partially submerged blades of grass, or other vegetation. The eggs then hatch in about 3 to 5 days, and in late May to early June, the tadpoles undergo full transformation into adult frogs.

Spring Peepers may also call later in the fall in September, October, or November when the temperature and barometric pressure changes and their hormonal levels are similar to that of earlier in the year in spring, but they do not breed during these times. As with some other frogs, Spring Peepers 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. For the rest of the year during the summer, Spring Peepers disperse to forage in the surrounding areas, and can be found amongst the moist forest floor leaf litter, under logs or other debris, or amongst low plants and shrubs.

The Spring Peeper's call is usually a distinctive, bird-like trilling "peep....peep", or "pe—eep" which can be made at varying pitches and frequencies depending on the environmental temperatures. Males may also occasionally give a territorial or spacing call differing in frequency when other males approach too closely. Like chorus frogs, and other very early spring breeding frogs, Spring Peepers 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.

Natural predators of Spring Peepers 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, Spring Peepers are listed as "Common". They are still regulated and protected along with all other of Wisconsin's herptiles, however under N.R. 16. Spring Peepers are currently not protected or regulated federally. Spring Peepers are currently IUCN Red-List Least Concern (LC).