



THE PETERSON FIELD GUIDE SERIES

# A Field Guide to Western Reptiles and Amphibians

Field marks of all species in  
western North America

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Mts., Cochise Co., Arizona. Old record for Nutria, McKinley Co.(?), New Mexico. A single specimen, perhaps escaped fish bait, has been taken at Island Lake, near Picacho, lower Colorado River, Yuma Co., Arizona. From 5000 to over 7000 ft. Map 45

## True Frogs: Family Ranidae

TYPICALLY slim-waisted, long-legged, smooth-skinned jumpers with webbed hind feet, and often with dorsolateral folds (glandular ridges) that extend from behind the eyes to the lower back. Any western tailless amphibian with dorsolateral folds is a true frog. Family headquarters in Africa but representatives on all continents. Only the large, widespread genus *Rana* (with some 250 species) occurs in the New World. There are 16 species in N. America north of Mexico, about equally divided between East and West, and a dozen more in the New World tropics. Two introduced species, the Bullfrog and the Green Frog, bring the western total to 10. The Leopard Frog and the Wood Frog range across the continent. A number of our western frogs are difficult to identify; rely heavily on the range maps.

In males during the breeding season, forelimbs and thumb bases become enlarged and webbing increases; a dark nuptial pad appears on the thumb. Amplexus pectoral. Vocal sac paired or single, generally inconspicuous.

### RED-LEGGED FROG *Rana aurora*

Pls. 11, 12

**Identification:** 2-5. Our largest western native frog. Red on lower abdomen and underside of hind legs, often overlying basic yellow coloration. Usually has a *dark mask bordered by a whitish jaw stripe*. Back with numerous small black flecks and larger, irregular, dark blotches of indistinct outline on brown, gray, or reddish ground color. In some individuals flecks join to form a more or less continuous network of black lines. Dark bands on legs. *Usually with coarse black (or gray), red, and yellow mottling in groin*. Relatively long legs; heel of adpressed hind limb extends to or beyond nostril. Eyes turned outward, well covered by lids as viewed from above; prominent dorsolateral folds. *Young:* May have yellow instead of red on underside of legs and in groin. *Male:* Enlarged forelimbs, thumb base, and webbing.

Frequents marshes, slow parts of streams, lakes, reservoirs, ponds and other, usually permanent, water. A pond frog. Most common in wooded areas in the lowlands and foothills, but also occurs in grassland. Attracted to places where cattails and other plants provide good cover. Generally found in or near water but

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lakes, reservoirs,  
 pond frog. Most  
 foothills, but also  
 canyons and other  
 near water but

disperses after rains and may appear on highways at night.  
 When not breeding, may be found in damp woods.

Similar species: (1) In the Spotted Frog the light jaw stripe usually extends to the shoulder, the groin is usually unmottled, and the eyes are turned slightly upward and are less completely covered by the lids. (2) Cascades Frog, a mountain species, has distinct black dorsal spots, yellowish color on the lower abdomen and underside of the legs, a yellowish, lightly mottled groin, and generally rougher skin. (3) See also Foothill Yellow-legged Frog.  
 Voice: A stuttering accelerating series of guttural notes on one pitch — *uh-uh-uh-uh-uh-rowr*, the last resembling a growl. Calls last about 3 secs. but are weak and easily missed. Occasionally only 3 or 4 chuckles are given. When the frogs are in chorus a continual low clucking is heard. Vocal sac single or absent, only moderately expandable. Breeding period short, often lasting only one or two weeks, usually Jan. to March, the time depending on locality.

Range: West of Cascade-Sierran crest from B.C. to n. Baja California. Perhaps formerly present in parts of Great Valley of California but now apparently absent. Introduced into Smoky Valley (Millett) and reported at Duckwater, Nye Co., Nevada. From near sea level to about 8000 ft.

Subspecies: NORTHERN RED-LEGGED FROG, *R. a. aurora*. Dorsal spots usually without light centers. To 3 in. CALIFORNIA RED-LEGGED FROG, *R. a. draytoni*. Dorsal spots usually with light centers. Skin rougher, limbs shorter, and eyes smaller than in the Northern Red-legged Frog.

Map 48

### WOOD FROG *Rana sylvatica*

Pl. 12

Identification:  $1\frac{3}{8}$ – $3\frac{1}{4}$ . A relative of the Red-legged Frog. A black or dark brown mask ending abruptly just behind the eardrum and bordered below by a white jaw stripe. Dorsal ground color brown, pink, gray, or greenish. Back often with 2 broad longitudinal light-colored stripes separated by a dark one, which may or may not be bisected by a whitish line. Dark spot on each side of chest near base of foreleg. Prominent dorsolateral folds. Individuals in the Northwest are short-limbed and toadlike.

In the East it is truly a wood frog, inhabiting damp shady woods in the vicinity of clear streams and leafy pools. It favors shade but when breeding it may move out of the forests. In the Northwest, in the colder parts of its range, it is chiefly diurnal and less a forest dweller. There it may be found in open grassy areas bordered by thickets of willow and aspen, and in tundra ponds. Spruce or other forest trees are often present nearby. Its coloration blends well with fallen leaves and the mottled light and shade of the forest floor.