

# Bullfrog

*Rana catesbeiana*  
Family Ranidae



**Global Rank:** G5

**State Rank:** S5 (WY); SE (CA, CO, ID, NV, OR, UT, WA); SE3 (MT); SE5 (AZ, NM)

**Distribution:** Native to most of North America east of the Rocky Mountains. The bullfrog has been introduced and established in western North America from southern British Columbia to northern Mexico. It ranges from near sea level to around 9,000 ft. (2,740 m.).

**Description:** Adults reach up to 7.9 in. (20 cm.) in snout-vent length. Key characteristics include large body; a short fold extends from the eyes over and behind a conspicuous ear drum or tympanum; a pale green to dark olive dorsal coloration, often with spots (without white-borders of leopard frogs) or dark mottling; belly is cream to yellow, sometimes with dark marbling. Legs may be banded and blotched with dusky colors. There are no dorsolateral folds. Young individuals may be as large as adults of other frog species. Tadpoles reach up to 6 in. (15 cm.) with key characteristics of the back and tail olive to greenish yellow with small black spots; belly is light colored. Adult males develop a yellow



*Current range of the bullfrog*

throat, a swollen and darkened thumb base, and the eardrums become larger than the eyes. The voice is a deep-pitched bellow suggesting *jug-o-rum* or *br-wum*. The vocal sac is single and internal.

**Reproduction:** The bullfrog breeds in lakes and large ponds with a breeding season from February to August. Up to 20,000 eggs per clutch are laid, spread out in a thin sheet over 12 in. (30 cm.) in diameter. Eggs sink onto submerged vegetation before hatching. Tadpoles may overwinter before transforming to the adult form.

**Food:** Adults are voracious carnivores and eat a variety of animals, including earthworms, insects, crayfish, frogs and their larvae, snakes, turtles, birds, and small mammals. Tadpoles eat algae, other submerged aquatic vegetation, and some animal matter.

**Habits:** Bullfrogs live in marshes, wet meadows, vegetated irrigation canals, ponds, and reservoirs. They prefer quiet or slowly flowing waters, and avoid areas without cover. Adults are wary, good jumpers, and difficult to catch. They may "play possum" and quickly recover and jump with loud squacks or *miaows*. They can be more easily captured at night using spotlights to detect reflections from their eyes.

**Management Implications:** The bullfrog is the only amphibian exploited extensively for food in the United States, and harvest is regulated. It has been introduced in many locations in the American West. Such introductions have been harmful to native frog populations since the bullfrog preys heavily on other frogs. The extinction of the northern leopard frog from at least one location in Washington is believed to be due to predation by bullfrogs.

**Important References:** Stebbins, R.C. 1985. A field guide to western reptiles and amphibians.

The Peterson Field Guide Series, Houghton Mifflin Company, New York, NY; Baxter, G.T., and M.D. Stone. 1980. Amphibians and reptiles of Wyoming. Wyoming Game and Fish Department, Cheyenne, WY; Csuti, B., A.J. Kimerling, T.A. O'Neil, M.M. Shaughnessy, E.P. Gaines, and M.M.P. Huso. 1997. Atlas of Oregon wildlife. Oregon State University Press, Corvallis, OR.