

Cascades Frog

Rana cascadae
Family Ranidae



Global Rank: G4

State Rank: S3 (CA, OR); S4 (WA)

Distribution: In Cascade Mountains from northern Washington to vicinity of Lassen Peak, California. Isolated populations in Olympic Mountains, Washington; Mount Shasta and Lassen Peak areas, and Trinity Mountains, California. Ranges from about 1,000 to 9,000 ft. (305 to 2,740 m.) in elevation. It rarely occurs below 2,600 ft. (800 m.) except in California.

Description: Adult Cascades frogs reach up to 3 in. (7.5 cm.) in snout-vent length. They are brown to olive-brown above, with well-defined inky black spots on the back and dark spotting on legs. Black flecks between the spots are scarce or absent. The lower abdomen and undersides of hind legs are yellow, orange-yellow, or yellowish tan. The groin is usually bright yellow with dark molting, and lower sides are yellowish or cream. Dorsolateral folds are present. Adult males have swollen and darkened thumb bases. The voice is a high-pitched grating, chuckling sound, and may be given either above or below water.



Current range of the Cascades frog

Reproduction: The Cascades frogs breed early, as soon as water becomes free of ice and snow. Eggs are laid from March to June with females laying about 300 eggs (range 100-600). Tadpoles form schools over their two-month larval period, and metamorphose in August and September. Some may overwinter as larvae. Sexual maturity is reached after three years.

Food: Adults feed on a variety of insects and other small invertebrates. Larvae eat algae and other organic matter.

Habits: Closely associated with water, this species occurs in lakes, ponds, and small streams that run through meadows. Preferred habitat is open coniferous forests with mountain meadows, riparian deciduous, and alpine meadows. It is a rather sluggish, often allowing close approach. When frightened, it usually attempts to escape by swimming rather than hiding. It is not known to be territorial. The size of home ranges is unknown.

Management Implications: Although their distribution was always discontinuous, they were formerly very abundant in some locations. One report of 30 locations (WA, OR) studied since the 1970s found that 80 percent had disappeared by 1990.

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; Csuti, B., A.J. Kimmerling, 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; Verner, J., and A.S. Boss. 1980. California wildlife and their habitats: Western Sierra Nevada. USDA Pacific Southwest Forest and Range Experiment Station, GTR PSW-37, Berkeley, CA.