

# Red-legged Frog

*Rana aurora*  
Family Ranidae



**Global Rank:** G4

**State Rank:** S2S3 (CA); S5 (WA);  
SE (NV); SU (OR)

**Distribution:** Subspecies are the northern red-legged frog (*R. A. aurora*) and the California red-legged frog (*R. A. draytonii*). Extends chiefly west of the Cascade-Sierran crest from British Columbia (Sullivan Bay) to northwestern Baja California (Arroyo Santo Domingo). Apparently no longer found in Great Valley of California. Introduced into Nye County, Nevada. May now be extinct in the southern Sierra Nevada, California, because of habitat disturbance and introduction of bullfrog. From near sea level to around 8,000 ft. (2,440 m.) in elevation.

**Description:** Reaches to about 5 1/4 in. (13.1 cm.) in snout-vent length. Red occurs on the lower abdomen and underside of hind legs, often overlying yellow ground color. It usually has a dark mask bordered by a whitish jaw stripe. The back often has many small black flecks and larger irregular dark blotches with indistinct outlines on brown, gray, olive, or



*Current range of the red-legged frog  
(Northern and California)*

reddish ground color. Dark bands are on legs and there is usually a coarse black, red, and yellow mottling in groin area. Has relatively long legs with the heel of the adpressed hind limb extending to or beyond the nostril. Eyes are turned outward and are well-covered by lids. There are prominent dorsolateral folds. Young may have yellow instead of red on underside of legs and in groin. Adult males have enlarged forelimbs, thumb base, and webbing. The voice is a stuttering *uh-uh-uh-uh-uh-rowr* lasting about 1-3 seconds, occasionally with chuckles, and sometimes given under water. During calling, the throat enlarges at center and at sides.

**Reproduction:** The breeding period is short (1-2 weeks), and may begin as early as February in lower elevations. About 2,000 eggs (range 750 to 4,000) are normally laid in pools of permanent, slow-moving water where they are attached to aquatic vegetation. Eggs hatch in about a month and tadpoles metamorphose about four months later. Sexual maturity is attained at three or four years of age.

**Food:** Adults eat invertebrates such as beetles, isopods, insect larvae, and other aquatic insects. Larvae eat aquatic algae and other organic debris.

**Habits:** This frog occurs in meadows, woodlands, and forests, but is usually found near ponds, marshes, and streams. It favors areas with dense ground cover and aquatic or overhanging vegetation. In non-breeding seasons, it occurs up to 300 yards from standing water. The home range is unknown and it is not thought to be territorial.

**Management Implications:** Heavily marketed in central California and elsewhere as source of frog legs in the late 1800s and early 1900s. Now absent from several parts of former range (southern Sierra Nevada and

Great Valley of California) due to habitat destruction and predation from the introduced bullfrog. Has special habitat requirement of quiet pools at least 3 ft. (1 m.) deep in permanent streams. Known to have had serious declines in recent years in the Willamette Valley of Oregon. It was formerly a federal candidate species.

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