

Tailed Frog

Ascaphus truei

Family Ascaphidae



Global Rank: G4

State Rank: S3 (ID, OR); S4 (MT, WA);
S2S3 (CA)

Distribution: Found in forested coastal and interior mountains of the Northwest from southern British Columbia to northern California, the Blue Mountains of Oregon, and the Rocky Mountains of Idaho and western Montana. Some herpetologists believe that the Rocky Mountain and Northwest populations may be different species. They are found from sea level to over 6,500 ft. (2,000 m.) in clear, cold, swift-moving mountain streams.

Description: Adult tailed frogs reach up to 2 in. (5 cm.) in snout-vent length. Key characteristics are no tympanic membrane (eardrum); the fifth toes on hindfeet are wider than others; pupils are vertical; skin is smooth to warty; and dorsal coloration can vary (yellow, gray, brown, or reddish). Mature males develop "tail." Tadpoles reach up to 2.4 in. (6 cm.) in total length and have a distinctive sucker-like mouth which allows them to attach to smooth rocks in well-oxygenated parts of streams. Tadpoles usually have a white spot on the tip



Current range of the tailed frog

of the tail, and coloration may vary (black, brown or tan), and may be uniformly colored or mottled.

Reproduction: Adults may not breed until 7-8 years of age, or 6-8 years after metamorphosis. Breeding occurs from May through late summer. They have no known voice. Fertilization is internal; male has tail-like copulatory organ. Eggs are laid in a string/cluster on the underside of rocks. Clutch size varies from 30 to nearly 100 eggs which are laid in July and hatch from August through September. Larvae metamorphose to adults in June to September after up to three years, depending on elevations and water temperatures.

Food: Adults eat a wide variety of insects and other invertebrates. Larvae mainly feed on diatoms, algae, and pollen.

Habits: Tailed frogs are restricted to cold, fast-flowing permanent streams, normally in forests. They are not found in lakes or ponds. Adults are most active from April through October, depending on locality. Adults emerge at night and may forage as far as 75 ft. (22 m.) from streams during moist weather. They remain on stream banks during dry weather.

Management Implications: Tailed frogs are indicator species for headwater streams in good condition (shade, cold water temperatures, high oxygen levels). They are known to decline after logging, loss of riparian vegetation, or other disturbances in these streams which increase water temperatures and sedimentation. Since tailed frogs are not known to migrate cross-country to other streams, metapopulations are easily lost and difficult to re-establish.

Important References: Stebbins, R.C. 1985. A field guide to western reptiles and amphibians. The Peterson Field Guide Series, Hought-

on 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; Groves, C.R., B. Butterfield, A. Lippincott, B. Csuti, and J.M. Scott. 1997. Atlas of Idaho's wildlife. Idaho Department of Fish and Game, Boise, ID.