

# Red-legged Frog

*Rana aurora* Baird and Girard 1852

INTRODUCED



**TAXONOMY.** The source population of Red-legged Frogs introduced on Chichagof Island in Southeast Alaska is unknown. Two subspecies of this Pacific Coast frog are generally recognized, although it has been suggested that the two may be distinct species. *Rana aurora aurora* (Northern Red-legged Frog) occurs from southwestern British Columbia, including Vancouver Island, to northern California, and *R. a. draytonii* (California Red-legged Frog) is found from California south to northern Baja California. The presence (in *R. a. draytonii*) or absence (*R. a. aurora*) of a light center in the dorsal spots may help separate the two forms.

**DESCRIPTION.** The Red-legged Frog is a stout, medium-to-large frog, measuring up to 13.6 cm (5.4 in.) SVL (northern forms may average smaller). The head is broader than long, and the snout rounded. The light jaw stripe usually ends at the shoulder, and the eyes look to the side. The hind legs are long (heel of hind leg when pulled forward extends to or beyond the snout), and the toes not fully webbed. The dorsum is reddish-brown to gray, with black speckling or very irregular black marks. The skin is smooth, and the dorsal folds are distinct. There is a bold

cream to yellow and black (or red) mottling in the groin area, and the underside of the hind legs and lower abdomen are translucent red (yellowish in young animals). Breeding males have enlarged forearms, thumbs, and webbing. The advertisement call is a weak stuttering "uh-uh-uh-uh-uh-rowr" lasting about 1-3 seconds, with the throat enlarging at the center and sides. Males usually call at night while submerged.

**DISTRIBUTION.** This species has a large range in western North America, occurring from southwestern British Columbia, including Vancouver Island, south along the coast to northwestern Baja California.

An introduced population of Red-legged Frogs has apparently become established in the Pavlof Bay drainage, NE Chichagof Island. It is thought they were planted there by a schoolteacher at the Freshwater Bay logging camp in 1982 or 1983. Frogs seen elsewhere on the island, near Freshwater Bay and possibly Hoonah, may be this species.

**NATURAL HISTORY.** This frog occurs in meadows, woodlands, and forests, but is usually found in or near ponds, marshes, and streams.



*Red-legged Frogs were introduced to the Pavlof Bay drainage on northwestern Chichagof Island in the early 1980s. They were still present in this area in summer 2002.*



*Adult frogs have translucent red hind legs, the color appearing to lie deep in the skin, and mottled groins.*

It prefers areas with dense ground cover and aquatic or overhanging vegetation.

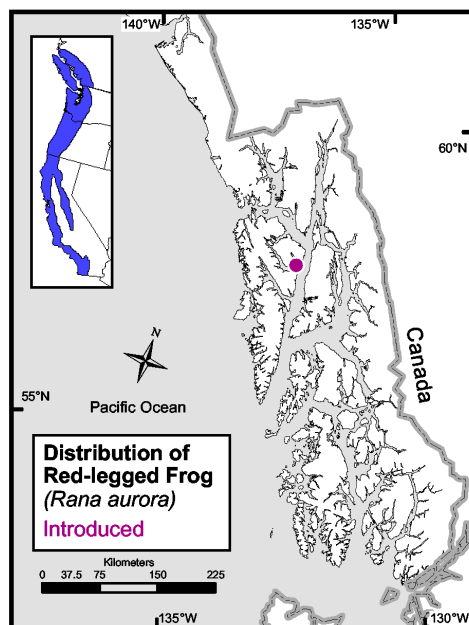
The breeding period of this species is short (1-2 weeks), and takes place in deep pools of permanent, slow-moving water. Large-sized eggs, averaging about 3 mm in diameter, are laid in a soft, grapefruit- to cantaloupe-sized mass, usually attached to submerged sticks and vegetation in the deepest water available. Before

hatching, the egg mass often floats to the surface, where it spreads out and looks frothy. Eggs hatch in about a month and tadpoles metamorphose about four months later. Sexual maturity is attained at three or four years of age.

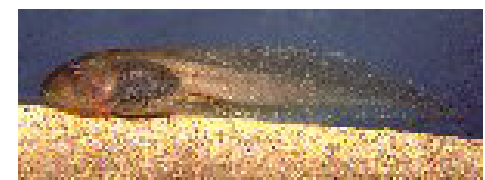
**CONSERVATION.** The status, distribution, and possible impacts of this Alaska exotic have not been studied. Serious declines and extirpations of local populations are known in Oregon and California primarily due to habitat loss, introduced predators, and perhaps disease.

**REMARKS.** Two captive Red-legged Frogs from British Columbia lived for 11 and 13 years, respectively.

**SELECT REFERENCES.** Corkran and Thoms 1996, Crother et al. 2000, Davidson et al. 2001, Hayes and Miyamoto 1984, Nussbaum et al. 1983, Stebbins 1985.



*Grapefruit-sized egg masses are attached to submerged vegetation and debris in deeper waters. Each egg mass is laid separately and usually not on top of others.*



*Tadpoles have an overall stubby appearance from their short tail and tall dorsal fin. Body color is tan with bright gold or brassy blotches, especially on the underside. They may reach 7 cm before transforming.*