

Southern Leopard Frog - *Rana sphenoccephala*

By: Jeff LeClere

Status

A valid fishing license is required to possess this species for bait or food. These frogs are uncommon and rather tough to distinguish from Iowa's other leopard frog species. They are found in extreme southeast Iowa. We would welcome any reports of this species.

Description

The southern leopard frog is uncommon in Iowa. They may grow to 3 1/2 inches body length. Southern leopard frogs are green or brown on top with a few round black spots scattered randomly about the back and on the sides, but none on the snout. The belly is plain white. There are two light complete dorsolateral ridges down the back. There are spots on the forelimbs and tiger stripes or bars on the hind legs. The groin and thighs have a greenish (very rarely yellowish) wash.

They differ from pickerel frogs by having round spots scattered randomly about the about the back, and a greenish wash on the thighs. Also pickerel frogs are found only in the trout streams of extreme eastern Iowa.

Subspecies

There are no subspecies of the southern leopard frog, *Rana sphenoccephala*

Range

The southern leopard frog is found only in the extreme southeastern corner of Iowa.

Habitat

The southern leopard frog is found in all water types. Lakes, ponds, rivers, streams, large and small wetlands, even homemade ponds. Leopard frogs move considerable distances from water, especially in wet grasslands or damp woodlands.

Habits{youtube}-B_yrYDLb9Y{/youtube}

Southern leopard frogs breed in March and April. Sometimes males call while underwater. They produce a chuckling call. A single female may lay 3,000 to 5,000 eggs in a round mass. The females may all lay eggs in one portion of the pond. Tadpoles metamorphose in about three months. During rainy weather, (especially during spring or fall migrations) numbers of these frogs may be seen crossing the roadway, especially near wetlands. During the summer they may venture into backyards and move into outdoor ponds or swimming pools. When they move far from a body of water, they may absorb dew to keep them moist. They hibernate in deep water. Automobiles take their toll on these frogs and any medium or large-sized carnivores prey upon them.

Food

Southern leopard frogs consume insects, earthworms, and other invertebrates.