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NORTHWEST WILDLIFE PRESERVATION SOCIETY

Pacific Tree Frog

Hyla regilla



Photo credit: Darren Colello

The Pacific tree frog is the smallest of the amphibians, but has the loudest voice. Hollywood often uses the croak of this species for a tropical background effect.

Characteristics

The Pacific tree frog's size ranges from 1.9 - 5.1 cm (0.8 - 2 inches). The female frog is slightly larger than the male. The frog has long slim legs with toes that have very little webbing and round pads for gripping and climbing.

The Pacific tree frog has rough skin. Its color varies from pale gray to tan to bronze or bright emerald green. A unique marking on the frog is a dark stripe that extends from the nostrils to the eye. They have dark patches or stripes along its back, and the underside is a pale cream.

The Pacific tree frog can also change color in a few minutes due to the temperature or humidity, and not to its background environment like most amphibians and reptiles. The color change acts as protection to help camouflage the frog as it crawls on the ground.

Lifecycle

The mating season for the Pacific tree frog is from November to July. The frogs travel to shallow wetlands, including marshes, ponds, lakes, ditches, and slow-moving streams, or temporary ponds to mate. The use of temporary ponds helps the Pacific tree frog avoid predators such as fish and other amphibians that require permanent bodies of water.

The male frog calls to attract females with a distinctive loud two-toned croak. To listen to the mating call, select this link: <http://www.naturepark.com/sound1.wav>

The female frog lays the egg cluster such that it attaches to sticks or vegetation. In shallow waters, she deposits the egg cluster on the bottom. Once the eggs are laid, the frogs leave the eggs, in result leaving the offspring to fend for themselves once hatched.

A single egg cluster can contain 10 to 70 eggs that hatch within two to four weeks, depending on the water temperature. Once hatched the tadpoles are about 1 cm long and take about two months to metamorphose into frogs.

Habitat

The Pacific tree frog is very common in southern BC, in particular woodlands, meadows, pastures, and even urban areas. They have been introduced to the Queen Charlotte Islands, but they do not exist east of the Rocky Mountain range. These frogs can also be found in parts of the US, as east as Montana, and as far south as Mexico.

The tadpoles live in the waters in which they were hatched until they become frogs. Once they are frogs, they spend most of their life on dry land, but must still keep their skin moist.

Their diet consists of spiders and a variety of insects. The frogs will often eat insects that are as long as they are. The tadpoles feed on algae.

Threats

The Pacific tree frog has many predators, including snakes, larger amphibians (such as bullfrogs), birds such as herons and cranes, and mammals such as skunk, raccoon, fox and coyote. Larger frogs and fish usually eat the tadpoles.

Currently, the Pacific tree frog is not considered an endangered species, but government laws protect them. In BC, these frogs are protected under the British Columbia Wildlife Act.

What we can do to help

Within the past ten years, scientists have noticed that the frog population has declined. They have attributed this decline to factors brought on by humans, specifically the increase of UV rays that resulted from the hole in the ozone layer, loss of habitat due to land development, and disease, which may have been caused by the introduction of different species to the ecosystems.

One of the biggest ways to ensure the Pacific tree frog does not become threatened is to help maintain and retain the world's wetlands. The wetlands are key to the frog's survival, since it is there that their life begins.

Also, to ensure that the numbers of these frogs do not decrease, obtain a permit before collecting the tadpoles for home or classroom observation.

Conclusion

Although the Pacific tree frog is not yet considered an endangered species, we must consider how to preserve these frogs before they reach that stage. It happens too often that we only consider how to save a species of animal once its existence is endangered.

Positive action while this frog is abundant is crucial to its longevity in the areas it inhabits.

Other Interesting Facts

--- amphibians were the first animals come out of the water onto ground over 300 million years ago, predating even reptiles.

--- the word amphibian means 'dual life' referring to their lifecycle in fresh water and land.

--- amphibians can breathe through their permeable skin.

--- frogs are terrific indicators as to the health of an ecosystem.

Bibliography

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