

Northern Cricket Frog

Acris crepitans

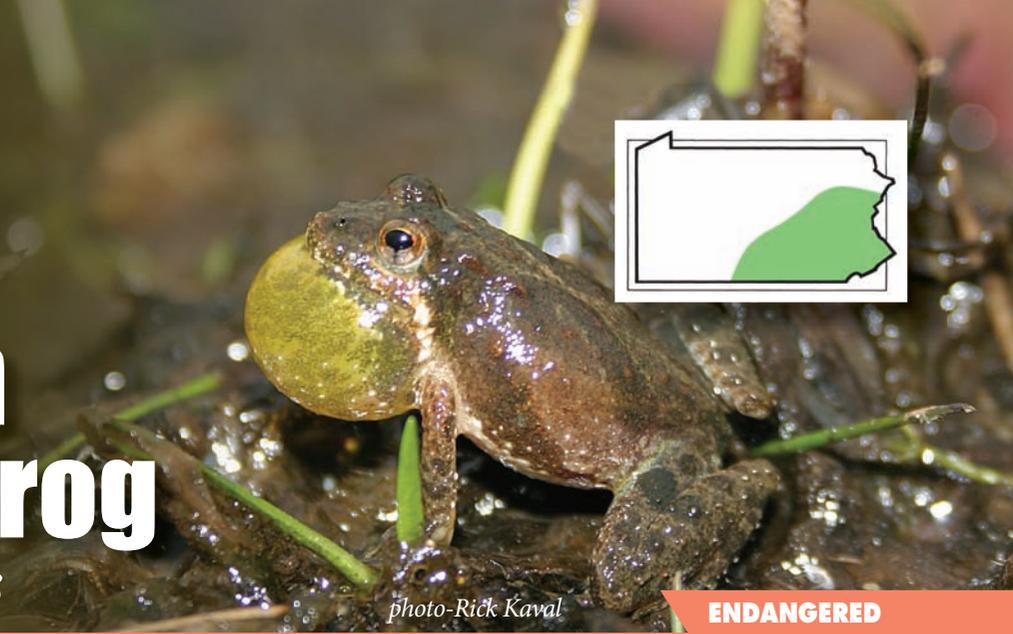
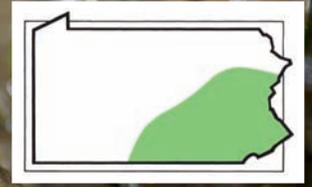


photo-Rick Kaval

ENDANGERED

General characteristics

You may have to look twice to see the Northern Cricket Frog. Its coloration and small size allows this tiny amphibian to conceal itself easily, so it is often difficult to find even if nearby. As an adult, it averages only $\frac{5}{8}$ to $1\frac{3}{8}$ inches long.

It is diurnal and when not basking in the sun, spends the rest of its day foraging for food. Although a member of the treefrog family, the Northern Cricket Frog is destined to spend most of its time on the ground, because this species has lost the large, adhesive toe pads typical of the treefrogs.

Identification

The skin of the Northern Cricket Frog is rough and warty. The base color is usually gray accented with darker stripes that run down each side of the back. The dark triangular patch located between the eyes is a major identifying mark.

A dark stripe, usually with an irregular edge, runs along the rear portion of the thigh and also helps identify this species. The legs of the Northern Cricket Frog are short with extensive webbing on the hind feet. The webbing reaches the tip of the first toe and this, along with the absence of toe discs, can also help sort this frog from other treefrogs and chorus frogs. The head is slightly rounded, almost blunt; the pupils of the eyes are horizontal.

Range

The Northern Cricket Frog occupies less than $\frac{1}{4}$ of Pennsylvania. Found in the southeast corner, its range falls within an arc beginning in Franklin County, then curving north and east to the southern edge of the Pocono Mountains. It is distributed from Long Island south to the Florida panhandle, then west to just inside of Texas.

Habitat

Considered more terrestrial than most aquatic frogs, the Northern Cricket Frog is content to hop among the sedges and grasses at the water's edge. When it feels the need to return to the water, the Northern Cricket Frog prefers

shallow, sun-drenched ponds punctuated with a substantial growth of vegetation in and along the water. It also can be found near slow-moving streams, often squatting on sandbars or banks of gravel where it warms itself in the glow of midday. It seeks shelter from extreme cold under stones and piles of fallen leaves.

When frightened, the Northern Cricket Frog quickly dives beneath the surface of the water where it promptly buries itself in the bottom mud.

Reproduction

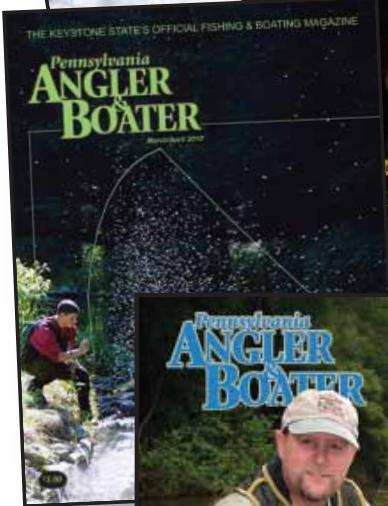
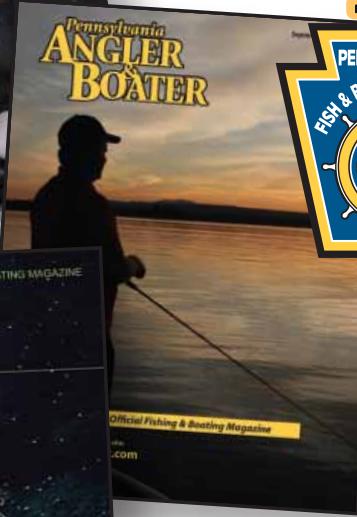
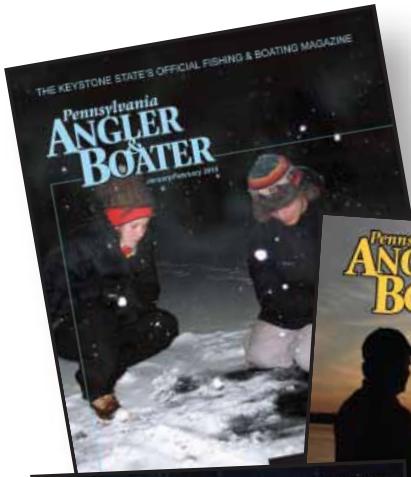
Although mating may occur anytime between April and August, the Northern Cricket Frog is generally considered to be a late breeder. Mating is accomplished when the male clasps the female just behind the forelegs as they float in the water. Two to 10 eggs are deposited singly or in small masses that become attached to submerged grasses, stems and leaves. Tadpoles may be seen as late as August and transformation follows in September.

Call

In its northern range, the Northern Cricket Frog is one of the last frogs to begin calling in full chorus. As the male sings, a single yellow throat pouch inflates and becomes the source of a shrill clicking sound, similar to a cricket. The call starts slowly, picks up speed and does not stop until 20 or 30 individual beats or clicks have been pushed out of the pouch. The sound has been described as two small stones rapidly clicked together. Singing often is done in full view with the male perched contentedly on the leaf of a water lily or other broad-leaved aquatic plant.

Food

The Northern Cricket Frog capitalizes on its ability to leap in long bounds when foraging for a meal. Insects are the mainstay of the diet, and much of the prey taken by this amphibian is caught "on the fly"—its knack for catching insects in mid-air helps ensure an adequate supply of food. ☐



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