Amphibians of Northeast Iowa

Amphibians live both in water and on land, so look for them in moist, dark place, like along bodies of water, under rocks, or in rotting logs.

Spring Peeper

A very small frog, can be less than an inch to 1.5 inches in body length. Color changes with temperature and varies from grey to shades of browns. Has a distinctive X on the back, and a dark bar between eyes. Legs have bars. Belly is lighter than rest of body. Very small toe pads. Found in woodlands. Mating call is a loud "peep, peep," like a baby chick and occurs in early spring after thaw. Hunts for small insects in low vegetation.

Pickerel Frog

Up to 3 inch body. Adults always tan or brown, never green. Four or five pairs of parallel squarish brown spots outlined in dark on back. Pair of light ridges runs completely down the back. Brown tiger stripes on legs. May be confused with brown Northern leopard frog, but different in square spots in parallel lines and yellowish thighs and groin. Found in clear trout streams or rivers, rarely lakes or ponds. Male mating call is deep snore or growl. Skin produces toxin harmful to predators.

Northern Leopard Frog

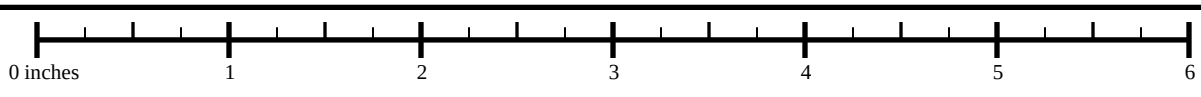
Up to 3.5 inches in body length. Varied shades of green or brown with dark, round spots outlined in lighter color scattered across the back, sides, and snout. Plain white belly. Two light ridges run completely down back. Forelimbs spotted; hind legs have tiger stripes. Thighs and groin greenish. Found in all water types. Male mating call s a deep, low snore or growl, often followed by a "urr, urr" chuckle. Feeds on insects, worms, and invertebrates.

American Toad

2-3 inch body. Short legs, stout body. Usually a shade of brown, may have black spots on back. Oval gland behind each eye. Belly white or yellow and heavily mottled. Usually a light stripe down the middle of the back. Will live just about anywhere, including cities, parks, and backyards. Needs semi-permanent water for reproduction. Male mating call is a high trill that can last up to 30 seconds. Protects itself by producing a toxin in skin , or by puffing itself up with air to look bigger.

Gray Treefrog

About 2.25 inches in body length at most. Can change from bright green to grayish brown in seconds. Often have a pattern on their backs. Belly white and usually unmarked. Inner thighs and legs washed with orange or yellow, usually only visible when frog jumps. Large toe pads make them excellent climbers, even allowing them to scale glass walls. Color changes with temperature, activity level, and surroundings. Male mating call is a short trill.



Green Frog

Iowa's second largest frog species, up to 4 inches in body length. Adults green or brown with few or no markings. Young frogs may be spotted. Bright green upper lip. Adult males usually have bright yellow throat. Prominent tympanums, or circular eardrum behind the eye. Unlike the bullfrog, has parallel ridges that run along back from eye to near hind legs. Found in permanent bodies of water. Male mating call sounds like raspy plunks of a banjo, 4 or 5 in a row.

Bullfrog

Iowa's largest frog species, reaching 8 inches in body length. Color varies from light green, to olive, to dark brown, and can change according to temperature. May have markings across the body. Prominent tympanums, or circular eardrums behind the eye. Unlike the green frog, does not have ridges running along the back. Live in permanent bodies of water. Male mating call is a deep "rum," usually repeated 5-6 times. Male bullfrogs will defend territories by wrestling with other males. When startled, often make a great leap and emit a loud "meap!" Will eat anything they can fit in their mouths, including fish, turtles, other frogs, or even birds.

Chorus Frog

A tiny frog, with a body length just over an inch. Color can be brown, gray, olive, or reddish. Three wide stripes run down the back. Stripes may be broken and brown, rusty, or green. Stripe along side from snout, through eye, to groin. Very tiny toe pads. Male mating call sounds like chirping cricket or running thumbnail down a fine-toothed comb.

Tiger Salamander

Can grow up to 13 inches in length. Black or grey with irregular yellow spots and blotches all over the body. Adults usually have a yellow throat and lower lip. Eyes have a gold iris. Front feet have four toes; back feet have five. Found in open fields, prairies, pastures, forests, and towns, or anywhere with permanent water. Abundant, but very secretive. Adults secrete milky toxin from glands on tail and back for defense. Eat anything smaller than themselves.

Cricket Frog

Small frog, up to 1.5 inches in body length. Brown, gray, or green. May be green blotches or a single stripe down the back, and likely a dark triangle between the eyes. Wartier than most frogs, with long, powerful legs. Found wherever there is water, preferably permanent bodies of water. Very strong legs let them jump as far as 3 feet. Avoid deep water, and will stay close to the water's edge. Male mating call sounds like pebbles being hit together quickly.