

A CLOSER LOOK



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Frog Strings

The leopard frog is probably the most easily recognized of the nine species of frogs and toads in North Dakota. After all, it's hard to hide your identity when flaunting big black spots on green or brown skin.

Leopard frogs are one of our first to emerge in spring, right about the time when shorefishing for pike is gaining speed. Male frogs emerge from their underwater slumber in anticipation of finding a mate. They float in the water, about where you're trying to cast your fishing lure, but not too close to other males.

Eventually one musters up the courage to start calling – a low, throaty note lasting a few seconds, followed by a few shorter grunts and croaks. The other males pipe in and soon your tranquil fishing spot is awash in frog noise.

The female leopard frog produces roughly 3,000 eggs, which hatch as tadpoles after two to three weeks and transform into froglets around July. After spring breeding fever has ceased, adults move into their summer homes.

Leopard frogs will travel quite far from their breeding water to find luxurious grasslands, with vegetation tall enough to go unnoticed, but short enough to navigate.

Frogs have been found more than 3 miles from their breeding grounds in summer. To learn this, a biologist didn't strap a fancy electronic tracking device to a frog, but rather mounted a spool of thread to the back of adults and simply followed the string.

Once a good summer home is found, the frogs proceed to sit. They find an area not necessarily near water but with moist soil, clear away dead vegetation, and sit and sit until the ground conforms to their bodies. They'll stay in their forms almost all day, eating any bugs and spiders that come within a tongue's reach. Once in awhile they'll move a few yards to a different form, seemingly just for a change of pace.

All that rest and relaxation in summer is necessary as fall brings a mass movement of adults and froglets, which have now grown to subadult size, in search of a suitable wintering lake, wetland or stream. Come September and October you may encounter masses of frogs crossing roadways, no strings attached.

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