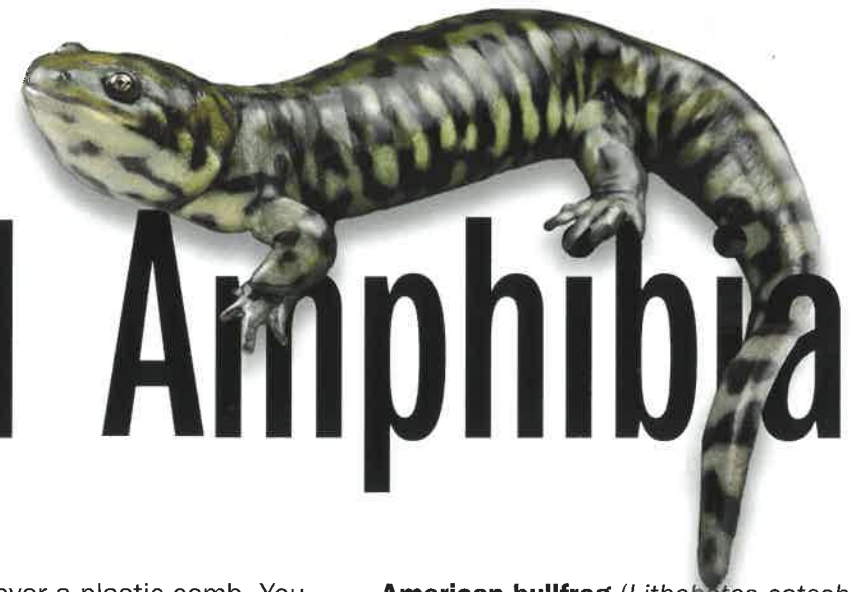




# Common Backyard Amphibians



Croaking, trilling and chirping sounds of Wyoming’s native amphibians are commonly heard on warm spring and summer nights if you live near water. Much like bird calls, frog and toad calls are unique to the species and are a good way to identify who your amphibious neighbors may be.

Amphibians can breathe through their skin, but to keep it permeable, it must stay moist. Some amphibians produce a mucous coating over their skin to keep it wet which often earns them the adjective “slimy.” It is also why amphibians are so closely tied to aquatic habitats. However, some amphibians in Wyoming, like spadefoot toads, are found in areas without permanent standing water. They spend most of their lives underground where it is cool and moist, only emerging after rainfall to find food and to breed in temporary puddles.

There are 12 species of amphibians in Wyoming, but only a few of them have ranges that cover large areas of the state. Depending on where you live, you may have different backyard amphibians than

what is discussed here. You can find information on the ranges, calls, and identifying characteristics for all Wyoming amphibian species by visiting <https://bit.ly/wyamphibs>.

We will start off our backyard amphibian investigation with a species that does not contribute to the amphibious summer song-fest. The **Western tiger salamander** (*Ambystoma mavortium*) is our state amphibian, and the only salamander species found in the state. Salamanders, unlike frogs and toads, do not communicate vocally. Tiger salamanders belong to a family of salamanders known as the “mole salamanders,” and, true to their name, spend most of their adult lives in tunnels or burrows they or small mammals have dug. You might find these salamanders in your window wells or basements, or beneath things like pots or log piles in your backyard.

**Boreal chorus frogs** (*Pseudacris maculata*) are very common throughout the state. As the smallest frog in Wyoming at 1.5 inches in length, they can be hard to see, but very easy to hear! Their call sounds

like a finger running quickly over a plastic comb. You can find these frogs near wetland areas or moist meadows up to about 12,000 feet in elevation. Adults are recognizable by their small size, and are often tan, brown or green colored. They have a black stripe on each side of their face, running from their nostrils through the eyes. They have three dark stripes on their back, although these stripes are often broken into blotches rather than a solid stripe.

The **Northern leopard frog** (*Lithobates pipiens*) is another common frog found throughout most of the state, up to about 9,000 feet in elevation. They are medium to large sized, with adults reaching up to 4.5 inches in length. They are brown or green colored, with large blotches covering their back and legs, and a gold stripe running down both sides of their body beginning at their eyes. Their call is a low snore-like sound interspersed with grunting and chuckling.

Although not a native, and hopefully not common in Wyoming backyards (they are considered invasive in most of the state), it is important to include the

**American bullfrog** (*Lithobates catesbeianus*) on this list so if you do see or hear it, you can report it to Wyoming Game and Fish Department. Bullfrogs are by far the largest amphibian you might see in the state, in both their tadpole and adult forms. They can stay in their tadpole stage for over a year, reaching lengths of six inches. Adults can reach a whopping two pounds and measure over eight inches in length. They have greenish to brown skin with darker spots covering



Chris Schaefer

Western tiger salamander during spring migration.



Mel Torres

Boreal chorus frog



Brett Addis

Northern leopard frog



Mason Lee, Biodiversity Institute, UW

Adult bullfrog; note the large tympanum behind the eye



Darren J. Braeley, shutterstock

Bullfrog tadpole



## What's the difference between a frog and a toad?

True toads are a sub-classification of frogs, in the family Bufonidae. They have drier skin than frogs, and often have warts, but these are very different than human warts. You cannot get warts from handling a toad! Toads have short back legs, so they move in hops, whereas frogs have long back legs that propel them forward in great leaps. True toads also have a parotoid gland behind their eyes which contains defensive toxins.

their head and body. They are most recognizable by their large body size and large tympanum (eardrum) on their heads, which can be up to twice the size of their eyes. Although named after their call, which sounds like a cow mooing, some believe bullfrog calls sound more like a lightsaber swishing through the air.

**Woodhouse's toad** (*Anaxyrus woodhousii*), formerly known as the Rocky Mountain toad, is a fairly widespread toad found east of the Continental Divide below about 6,000 feet in elevation. They are a tan to green color and have many warts over their body. They have a white stripe extending down the center of their back, as well as green and yellowish mottling. Woodhouse's toad can reach about five inches in length. Their cry is very nasally and sounds similar to the crying of a calf.

Amphibians are environmental indicators, and the presence of native amphibians on your property can indicate a healthy ecosystem. Amphibians help to control insect populations and serve an important role as both predator and prey. You can protect amphibians by protecting their habitat, reducing the use of pesticides, and keeping exotic species such as cats and dogs away from these vulnerable animals, so you can enjoy their soothing summer songs for years to come.

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Woodhouse's toad

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Northern leopard frogs