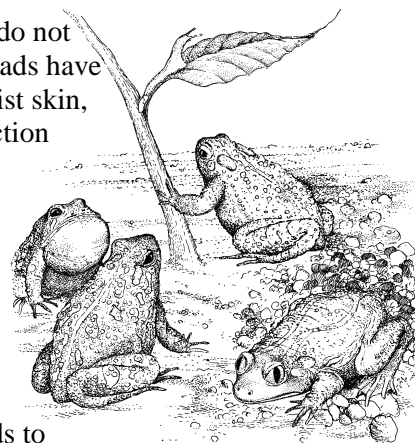


## Toads and Frogs of Hernando County

Can't tell the difference between toads and frogs? Don't worry, many scientists do not make a distinction because the differences are unclear in most cases. Usually toads have dry skin with warts, they hop and remain on the ground. Usually frogs have moist skin, they leap and are able to climb. In other areas of the world, however, the distinction is not so clear. They have toads that climb and frogs that walk and hop.

There are 28 species of toads and frogs native to Florida. Of those species six are commonly found in Hernando County.

The eastern spadefoot toad (*Scaphiopus holbrooki*) has a spade on the heel of each hind foot which is how it got its name. It uses these spades to make a burrow about eight to ten inches under the soil's surface. They spend the day underground and come out to feed at night. One or two nights a year, with a low barometric pressure and heavy rains, they will head for flooded ditches and fields to breed. The males call the females with a loud snorty grunt which he repeats every five to ten seconds. Males are yellowish in color and females are brownish. They have large yellowish eyes with a vertical pupil. They grow to a maximum of 3.25 inches. Wash your hands well after touching one as their skin secretions can irritate the skin.



The oak toad (*Bufo quercicus*) is our smallest toad growing to a size of 1.25 inches. Usually found in sand-pine scrub, longleaf pine-turkey oak, and xeric hammocks, it often frequents towns and wooded suburbs. It can often be seen after a heavy rain. They are dark brown with a light colored stripe down their back. The males call the females with a "cheep-cheep" sound similar to a peeping chick. They breed along the edges of roadside ditches and temporary ponds.

The southern toad (*Bufo terrestris*) is a very common toad and can be found in all habitats, from wet to dry. Active at night, it can be seen crossing roads in the rain in search of food or a pond for breeding. During the day, it can be found under logs or in shallow burrows in the sand. The southern toad is grayish, dark brown or reddish and grows to be about 3.6 inches. On warm, humid nights their long high-pitched trill can be heard.

The Florida cricket frog (*Acris gryllus dorsalis*) is a rather small tree frog growing to about one inch in length. Tree frogs usually have enlarged toe pads for climbing trees. The Florida cricket frog does not have enlarged toe pads and is not a very strong climber. It comes in many colors from brown to gray and green, and has a "Y" shaped stripe down the center of its back. It can be found around fresh water lakes, ponds and roadside ditches. They call during the day as well as the night and sound like two marbles clicking together.

The southern leopard frog (*Rana sphenoccephala*) is light brown with dark brown spots and most have some amount of light green. The upper of the iris is gold and matches the stripe which passes through the eye. It is a medium sized frog reaching a maximum length of five inches. When frightened, this frog can jump three to four feet. Their "chuckle" sounding voice can be heard throughout the year, but mostly in winter and early spring.

The Florida gopher frog (*Rana areolata aesopus*) is a medium sized frog reaching a maximum length of 4.5 inches. It is light gray with black spots and brown ridges. Like the southern leopard frog, the gopher frog has a gold upper iris. After a heavy rain, you may hear their call which sounds like a loud, deep snore. It does not live close to water like many other frogs. They live in dry habitats in gopher tortoise burrows and may travel more than a mile to get to a breeding pond. Due to a decline in gopher tortoises, the gopher frog has lost much of its favored habitat. It has become a species of special concern.

Frog biologists are concerned with the decline in frogs throughout the world. Their decline may be due to new viruses, changes in ultra-violet radiation, acid rain or possibly a combination of these factors. Frogs lived during the dinosaur age and have survived even though other animals have become extinct. Researchers are worried something may be seriously wrong with the global environment.

by Cindy Conard

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