

# Southern Leopard Frog (*Lithobates sphenoccephala*)

Pennsylvania Endangered Frog Species

State Rank: S1 (Critically Imperiled) Global Rank: G5 (Secure)

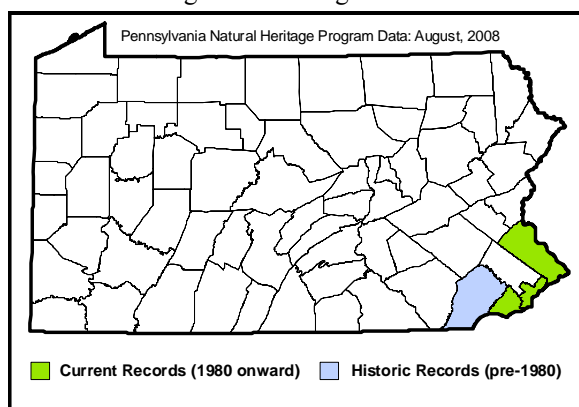
## Identification

The Southern Leopard Frog is typically 50-80mm (2" to 3¼") long, and has a narrow snout. The color of the Southern Leopard Frog is quite variable, with some individuals being green, some dark brown, and every shade in between. The belly of the frog is white. A conspicuous white spot can be found in the center of the tympanum, or ear spot. Breeding calls of this species has been likened to the sound of muffled laughter, and this species is known to only call after dark. The Southern Leopard Frog may be confused with the Northern Leopard Frog (*Lithobates pipiens*) or the Pickerel Frog (*Lithobates palustris*). The Northern Leopard Frog has been found nearly statewide, but does not tolerate the brackish waters often inhabited by its southern cousin. Lacking the Southern Leopard Frog's tympanic white spot, the Northern Leopard Frog has suffered declines and is also considered a species of concern in the Commonwealth. The Pickerel Frog is a very common species, and while spotted like the Leopard Frogs, the Pickerel Frog has squarish spots and a yellow tinge between the hind legs and on the lower portion of the belly. The Pickerel Frog can be found statewide, and is typically associated with vegetated flowing streams and creeks.

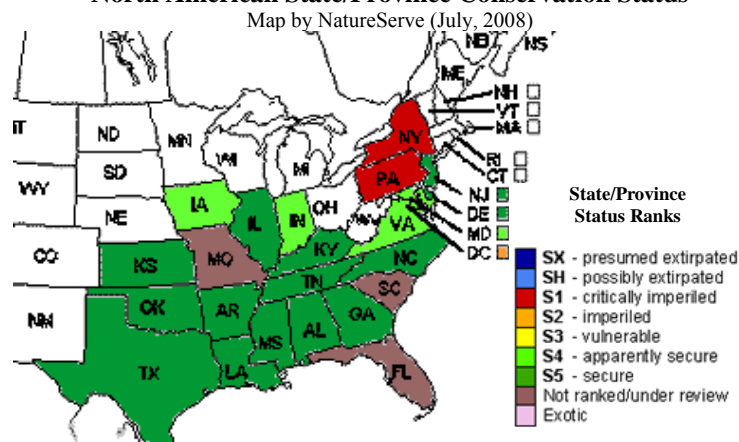


Southern Leopard Frog (*Lithobates sphenoccephala*) with prominent white spot on the tympanum.

photo source: Tom Diez



## North American State/Province Conservation Status



## Range

The Southern Leopard Frog's range in the Commonwealth is limited to the southeastern corner. Outside of Pennsylvania this species' range extend from coastal New York south along the seaboard to Texas.

## Habitat

Southern Leopard Frogs frequent vegetated edges of shallow wetlands, along the Coastal Plain Province of Pennsylvania. The species is very skittish, and will flee into water, or into thick vegetation at the slightest sign of alarm. Breeding typically occurs in April, with tadpoles transforming into froglets and becoming terrestrial in June. While the breeding wetlands are typically open habitats, outside of the breeding season, Southern Leopard Frogs are known to frequent shaded areas with large areas of grass, rush, and sedge cover. Adults may travel quite a ways from the breeding wetlands.

## Conservation Status

The Southern Leopard Frog has always been rare in Pennsylvania. Limited Coastal Plain habitat exists in the state, and the remaining areas were habitat for these frogs exists are under continual developmental pressure. Populations of Southern Leopard Frogs have declined due to habitat destruction and many historic locations are now developed and will never be suitable for Southern Leopard Frogs. The apparent population decline, and the widespread destruction and modifications of habitat for these frogs has led the Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission to list the Southern Leopard Frog as an endangered species.

## References

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- Hulse, A.C., C.J. McCoy and E.J. Censky. 2001. Amphibians and Reptiles of Pennsylvania and the Northeast. Cornell University Press, New York. 419pp.
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