



## California red-legged frog *Rana draytonii*



**CLASSIFICATION**  
Threatened—May 1996

### DESCRIPTION

The California red-legged frog is the largest native frog in the western United States. It ranges in size from 1.5 to 5 inches long (4 to 13 cm).

The abdomen and hind legs of adults are mostly red. The back has small black flecks and larger irregular dark blotches. These have indistinct outlines on a brown, gray, olive, or reddish background color. The spots on the frogs' backs usually have light centers. Lateral folds are prominent on the back.

Tadpoles (larvae) are from 0.6 to 3 inches (14 to 80 mm) long. They are dark brown and yellow, with darker spots.

California red-legged frogs breed from November through March with earlier breeding records occurring in southern localities—northern populations breed from January to March.

### DIET

The diet of California red-legged frogs is variable. Larvae probably eat algae. Invertebrates, such as insects, are the most common food items of adult frogs. Larger frogs frequently eat vertebrates, such as Pacific tree frogs and California mice.

Young frogs are active both during the day and at night, whereas adult

frogs are largely nocturnal. Feeding likely occurs along the shoreline and on the surface of the water.

### DISTRIBUTION

The species is native and restricted to California and Baja California, Mexico, at elevations ranging from sea level to approximately 5,000 feet (1,500 meters). Records of the California red-legged frog are known from Riverside County to Mendocino County along the Coast Range; from Calaveras County to Butte County in the Sierra Nevada; and in Baja California, Mexico.

California red-legged frogs are still locally abundant within portions of the San Francisco Bay area (including Marin County) and the central coast.

Within the remaining distribution of the species, only isolated populations have been documented in the Sierra Nevada, northern Coast, and northern Transverse ranges.

The species is believed to be extinct from the southern Transverse and Peninsular ranges, but is still present in Baja California, Mexico.

### THREATS

California red-legged frogs are currently threatened by loss of habitat from the growth of cities and suburbs, mining, overgrazing by cattle, invasion of nonnative plants, impoundments, water diversions, stream maintenance for flood control, degraded water quality, and introduced predators, such as bullfrogs.

The fragmentation of existing habitat and the continued colonization of existing habitat by nonnative species may represent the most significant

current threats to California red-legged frogs.

### SURVEYING

Researchers have tracked radio-collared frogs into extremely small, vegetation-choked drainages, where they can be found only with radio-tracking devices, and are otherwise invisible to standard surveys. Frogs hide in heavy vegetation and under banks, in holes, in cracks and under objects. A researcher may be able to locate a collared frog by radio to within one square meter and still not be able to see it.

Frogs foraging, resting, or dispersing in upland areas also may not be detected by surveys. A great deal of experience, especially with nighttime surveys, is necessary to insure detection of frogs. Because of these difficulties associated with surveying for the frog, negative survey results do not necessarily indicate an absence of the species, even if conducted by highly qualified biologists. Frogs actually seen during surveys probably represent a relatively small subsample of those actually present.

Therefore, in areas where frogs have been found in the vicinity and suitable habitat is present, suitable habitat accessible to frog populations occurring within five miles should be presumed to be occupied by the species.

**CRITICAL HABITAT:**  
Designated—March 2010

**RECOVERY PLAN:**  
Final—September 2002