

Wetland Voices: Frogs and Toads of Connecticut



As winter fades and spring arrives, Connecticut's wetlands, ponds, and forests come alive with the calls of frogs and toads. These amphibians are an important and often overlooked part of the state's natural heritage. From tiny spring peepers to deep-voiced bullfrogs, Connecticut's frogs and toads play a vital role in local ecosystems and offer valuable insight into environmental health.

Connecticut is home to **eleven species of frogs and toads**, representing several amphibian families. Frogs and toads are cold-blooded animals that spend part of their lives in water and part on land, making them especially sensitive to pollution, habitat loss, and climate change. Because of this sensitivity, **scientists consider amphibians important indicators of ecosystem health.**

Among the most familiar species is the **American toad**, commonly found in gardens, forests, and suburban neighborhoods. Its long, musical trill is a hallmark of late spring evenings. The **Fowler's toad**, similar in appearance, prefers sandy areas near rivers and shorelines. Both species help control insect populations including many garden pests.

Both **treefrogs** and **spring peepers** add another layer to Connecticut's amphibian diversity. The **spring peeper**, one of the smallest frogs in the state, produces a loud, high-pitched "peep" that often signals the start of spring. The **gray treefrog**, known for its ability to change color, can be heard later in the season with a soft, musical trill. Despite their small size, these frogs are powerful singers and are often heard before they are seen.

Larger frogs are common near water. The **green frog** produces a banjo-like "plunk" sound and is frequently found along ponds and streams. The **bullfrog**, the largest frog in North America, has a deep, resonant call that carries across wetlands on warm summer nights. Other notable species include the **wood frog** (pictured above), which breeds in temporary vernal pools, and the **pickerel frog** and **northern leopard frog**, both recognized for their distinctive spotting patterns.

One of the most elusive amphibians in Connecticut is the **eastern spadefoot**, a distinct type of primitive fossorial frog, spends most of its life underground. It emerges only during heavy rains to breed in temporary pools.

Species with Endangered or Special Concern status include the eastern spadefoot, which is listed as endangered, and the **northern leopard frog**, which is considered a species of special concern in the state. The Fowler's toad and the wood frog are both listed as species of greatest conservation need due to severe declines in their habitats.

Protecting frogs and toads requires understanding how their populations are changing over time. One way residents can help is through **Frog Watch USA**, a nationwide citizen science program dedicated to monitoring frog and toad populations by listening to their calls. The program trains

volunteers to identify amphibians by sound and record when and where species are heard during the breeding season.

In Connecticut, Frog Watch USA is offered through local conservation organizations, including **Connecticut's Beardsley Zoo**. Each year, the zoo invites community members to become citizen-scientist volunteers by monitoring nearby wetlands during the spring and summer months. Participants attend a training session — offered virtually or in person — where they learn about local frog species, call identification, and standardized survey methods.

After training, volunteers visit assigned sites once or twice a week for about 15 minutes, beginning roughly a half-hour after sunset when frogs are most active. Observations are submitted to a national database used by scientists to track amphibian populations and detect long-term environmental changes. No prior experience is required, making the program accessible to families, educators, and nature enthusiasts.

The frogs and toads of Connecticut are more than background noise on a warm evening. They are essential members of local ecosystems and living indicators of environmental change. By listening carefully — and participating in programs like Frog Watch USA— residents can help ensure these voices continue to be heard for generations to come.