

U3A Port Fairy

Science...naturally!

Frogs of Port Fairy

John Miller: 4 August 2020

This is the 20th in a series of guides for U3A members around Port Fairy and district to help us get out and about safely during COVID-19 restrictions. The aim of the guides is to provide enjoyable outdoor activities that can be undertaken either by yourself or others (in accordance with Government directives).

This U3A Port Fairy guide aims to provide a brief snapshot of the frogs that are likely to occur in the Port Fairy area.

The definitive guide to frogs for the whole of Australia is ***Frogs of Australia*** which has a terrific website that can be found at: <https://frogs.org.au/frogs/>

The website provides you with everything you ever wanted to know about our amphibian friends and I highly recommend it.

What is a frog?

Frogs are amphibians – that is, they spend some of their life on land and some of their life in water.

Salamanders (which includes newts and efts) and Caecilians – worm-like critters confined to the wet tropics around the world (see: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Caecilian>) are also amphibians but neither group occur in Australia.

Frogs are known for their jumping abilities, croaking sounds, bulging eyes and moist skin. They live all over the world and are among the most diverse animals in the world, with estimates ranging from 4,000 to more than 6,000 species.

Frog or toad

There is no scientific distinction between frogs and toads but there are a few features that lead to some species being commonly referred to as frogs and some being commonly referred to as toads:

- Frogs are mostly aquatic Toads are mostly terrestrial
- Frogs have teeth Toads do not have teeth
- Frogs are longish Toads are short and squat

But regardless of whether it is called a frog or a toad, all amphibians require water for breeding, so while a toad may live mainly on dry land, it needs to be in a pond or other calm water in which to mate and deposit their eggs which later emerge as the familiar tadpole.

Tadpoles

Frogs lay eggs, usually in a gelatinous floating mass, which then hatch into tadpoles – the larval stage in the life cycle. Most tadpoles are fully aquatic and have gills for breathing in water and a tail which enables them to swim around to feed and get away from predators. After the larval period, of usually 12-16 weeks, the tadpole undergoes metamorphosis which enables it to emerge from a fully aquatic life to a fully terrestrial life. During metamorphosis the tail is reabsorbed, legs grow (usually the hind ones first), diet changes and lungs develop to enable the new frog to breathe air. A truly extraordinary process and one of the marvels of nature.

Frog calls

Frogs are generally pretty hard to see in the wild. They are most often active during the night, often live in or near swampy areas with dense reeds and other aquatic vegetation and their camouflage patterned skin makes them very difficult to see, even when you are standing right alongside them. But when they are active they are also often calling – croaking out a territorial warning to any interlopers or serenading a potential mate. Thankfully, most frogs have a distinctive call and, after a bit of experience, can be confidently identified by call alone.

I have described the frog calls in this guide but it is usually much better to actually hear the call to be sure you have the right one. Calls can be heard at **Frogs of Australia** website <https://frogs.org.au/frogs/> in the detailed species information section.

Better still, get the Australian Museum frog call App for your phone so you can listen to the call while you are out searching for frogs. The App for Android and iPhone can be found at: www.frogid.net.au The App also enables you to send frog sighting records to the museum and thereby contribute to a greater understanding of frog distribution and habitat requirements.

Finding frogs

The best way to find frogs is to go out in the evening, particularly after (or during) rain, with a torch to an area that you are familiar with. Walking a short distance along the Port Fairy-Koroit Bike Trail north of Regent Street is a good spot as the paved path is alongside reed-lined freshwater swampy depressions where you should be able to at least hear them in suitable conditions. If the conditions are right, you won't have to go too far – they will be calling furiously. You may not see them but you will certainly be able to hear them. I heard a Southern Brown Tree Frog calling near James Street just a couple of nights ago.






Handling frogs




It is best to not handle frogs – not because they are dangerous but because you may be spreading a nasty and often fatal disease to the frog.

Chytridiomycosis is an infectious disease that affects amphibians worldwide. It is caused by the chytrid (pronounced: kit-rid) fungus (*Batrachochytrium dendrobatidis*), a fungus capable of causing sporadic deaths in some amphibian populations and 100 per cent mortality in others. Frogs have lungs but also breathe through their skin, which is why frog skin is always moist. The chytrid fungus grows on the moist skin and, if the infestation is severe enough, may end up suffocating and killing the frog.

You could have chytrid fungus spores on your hands so handling a frog may lead to the unintentional spread of the disease. So, it's best just to look and listen and not touch.

Frogs of the Port Fairy area

Name	Habitat	Call	ID
<p>Southern Brown Tree Frog <i>Litoria ewingi</i></p>	<p>Common in most habitats from flooded pasture, swamps and urban gardens.</p>	<p>Repeating rapid "creeeeee creee creee cree cree cree" First "creee" longest.</p>	
<p>Growling Grass Frog <i>Litoria raniformis</i></p>	<p>Close to or in water or very wet areas in woodlands, shrublands, and open and disturbed areas such as farm dams.</p>	<p>A growl of about one second duration - "crawark-crawark-crok-crok".</p>	
<p>Eastern Common Froglet <i>Crinia signifera</i></p>	<p>Common in wet and dry forests, woodlands, floodplains, open and disturbed areas sheltering under logs and other debris.</p>	<p>A series of three to five chirping calls, rapidly repeated in a long series - "crick crick crick crick crick".</p>	
<p>Southern Smooth Froglet <i>Geocrinia laevis</i></p>	<p>Moist areas in dry forest, woodlands, shrublands, open and disturbed areas.</p>	<p>A long slowly pulsed rattling or creaking sound, "cre-e-e-e-e-ek cre-e-e-e-ek cre-e-ek".</p>	
<p>Eastern Banjo Frog, Pobblebonk <i>Limnodynastes dumerili</i></p>	<p>Frequent in all habitats. Likely to be the one you dig up in your vegie garden!</p>	<p>Rapid repeated series of "bonk bonk bonk bonk" lasting about one second.</p>	

Name	Habitat	Call	ID
<p>Striped Marsh Frog</p> <p><i>Limnodynastes peroni</i></p>	<p>Frequent in swamps, flooded grasslands, pools and ponds.</p>	<p>A "tock" or "poc" with similar inflections to a hen's "cluck".</p>	
<p>Spotted Marsh Frog</p> <p><i>Limnodynastes tasmaniensis</i></p>	<p>Wet areas, flood plains, and semi-permanent water in habitats ranging from open forests, woodlands and grasslands including open and disturbed areas.</p>	<p>A single sharp call - "click" or "plock" - similar to the sound made when two stones are struck together.</p>	
<p>Common Spadefoot Toad</p> <p><i>Neobatrachus sudelli</i></p>	<p>Most often found in dry habitats, including woodlands, shrubland, mallee, open, and disturbed areas and may be found wandering on moist nights, far from permanent water.</p>	<p>Slowly pulsed musical trill - "craa-aw-aw-aw-aw-aw-awk".</p>	
<p>Southern Toadlet</p> <p><i>Pseudophryne semimarmorata</i></p>	<p>Dry forest, woodland, shrubland, grassland, and heaths. They shelter under leaf litter and other debris in moist soaks and depressions.</p>	<p>A very short harsh grating note - "cre-ek" - repeated every few seconds.</p>	