

Leopard Frogs (Rana Pipiens)

Description:

Slender greenish to brownish frog with dark spots which, are usually edged with a lighter color. It has a light stripe along its upper jaw and tends to grow to be 2 – 4 inches long as adults.

Habitat and Life Cycles:

The preferred habitat of leopard frogs includes practically any type of fresh water from weedy shorelines of large lakes to small marshes and streams. However, these frogs often venture far from water.

In the autumn leopard frogs migrate to the bodies of water that will be their breeding pools the following spring. Entering the water, they bury themselves in the bottom mud, where they hibernate throughout the winter. Frogs need to hibernate for about 3 months: at 37°-39°F. Frogs in captivity do not hibernate and should be kept warm (59°F at night and 77°F during the day).

Mating occurs when the frogs emerge from hibernation; and the females produce hundreds of gelatin-covered eggs, which form a mass from 10-15cm in diameter. The eggs hatch in a few days into tadpoles, which feed on algae and decaying vegetation for two to three months (depending mostly on water temperature and available food).

Diet:

The natural foods of leopard frogs - live insects (such as crickets, darkling beetles, and ground beetles), mealworms and earthworms can simply be placed in the cage near the frog. Frogs will rarely eat dead insects. Although it is best to feed them regularly, they can be left over weekends and short vacations without detrimental effects.

Housing and Care:

A 20- or 40-liter aquarium is an ideal container for captive leopard frogs, but it must have a cover to prevent specimens from jumping out, and it must be set up to allow access to water, dry land and a hiding place. Like other amphibians, leopard frogs have moist skins that permit the loss or absorption of water, so they must always have 2.5-5cm of fresh water available.

You may build up one end of an aquarium as a land habitat with soil or gravel and leave the other as a water habitat. This arrangement can make cleaning the cage and changing the water difficult. An environment that is safe, healthy, attractive and practical can be set up in a planted terrarium (5cm soil with several bushy plants) that also contains a water dish 5cm deep. Or a gravel substrate can be used with a potted plant and a piece of bark or wood.

Fill a 2-gal plastic container with lid (can be purchased from Wal-Mart or other dept stores), with 4-6 inches of water, enough so the frog can submerge his whole body. Add a rock or piece of wood for the frog to bask on top of. This makes for easy cleaning and feeding. Rinse container and add clean water daily.

Health:

Captive leopard frogs are more susceptible to disease than most other amphibians. They sometimes develop a disease known as red-leg. This is not likely to occur if the frogs are kept in an appropriate environment, if they have the opportunity to climb out of the water, if they have plenty of room (avoid crowding several frogs into the same enclosure), and if the water is kept clean.

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Observations, Activities and Questions:

- Observe and describe a leopard frog. Can you find the ears and nostrils? How many spots does the frog have? Do all leopard frogs have the same number of spots? How are the spots shaped? What color are the spots? How many toes are there on the front feet? How many toes are on the hind feet? Is there webbing between all the toes?
- Describe how leopard frogs catch and swallow their prey.
- Place a leopard frog on the floor and measure how far he can leap.
- Determine the breathing rate of a leopard frog by counting the number of times its throat moves in one minute.