

American Bullfrog (Lithobates catesbeiana)

A failed frog-leg industry and a voracious eater threaten native frogs.

The American Bullfrog, the largest of the North American frogs, grows to be the size of a dinner plate and weigh half a kilogram. Bullfrogs have an appetite to match their size: they eat whatever fits into their mouths, including frogs, snakes, insects, small turtles, birds and mammals. Adult males have a distinctive and booming "jug-o'-rum" call that can be heard in the late spring and summer. They live in freshwater ponds and lakes across southern Vancouver Island, on some Gulf Islands and in the Lower Mainland. A new population has invaded BC near the Nelway border crossing, which is just south of Salmo.



American Bullfrog (*Lithobates catesbeiana*)

Impact on Communities and Native Species

Bullfrogs are bad news for native frog species. Not only is the bullfrog a glutton for native frogs—it also reproduces rapidly and pushes other species from its habitat. A single female bullfrog can lay an egg mass containing up to 20,000 eggs. Bullfrogs also spread a fungal infection that doesn't harm the bullfrog, but kills other newly exposed frogs. In their native habitat, bullfrogs have predators such as bass, pike and snapping turtles that keep them in check, but in British Columbia, the usual frog predators find the tadpoles unpalatable and the large adult frogs too big to eat.

Invasion History

Frog farms were promoted as an entrepreneurial venture for veterans returning from World War II. But the farms didn't make a profit in BC, and the bullfrogs were released into the wild, where they flourished. Bullfrogs were also imported for sale by aquatic garden supply companies and escaped their backyard ponds. Tadpoles are sometimes inadvertently imported with goldfish shipments and raised by well-meaning pet owners who might not realize their impact. Even schools can order bullfrogs and tadpoles from biology supply companies. We can only hope that classes do not release adult frogs when the lesson is over.

Identifying Characteristics:

- up to 20 centimetres long
- olive/yellow with grey belly
- males have bright yellow throats during mating season
- very large ear drums (tympanic membranes)
- a skin fold wraps around the ear drum, but there are no ridges down the back
- tadpoles have heads the size of a ping-pong ball