

Pig Frog *Rana grylio*

Bullfrogs just croak, or so everyone thought until early settlers heard large grunting frogs in Southern swamps.

It was a big noise that some said sounded like a pig and others likened to an alligator. “Pig” frog won as the common name for *Rana grylio*, an exclusively Southern bullfrog. The confusion still exists. Visitors on the boardwalk often mistake the calls of Pig Frog for those of alligators and excitedly report hearing choruses of alligators in the marsh and cypress forest.

The scientific name *Rana grylio* reflects the common name: *Rana* from the Latin *rana* for frog and *grylio* from the Greek *gryllos* for pig.

Pig Frogs have three different calls. The regular call sounds like the guttural grunt of a pig; a second call sounds like the single snapping of a really large, stretched and taut rubber band; the final call, an alarm call, is a single squeak. Female Pig Frogs are usually silent, but when alarmed they too produce the low-pitched alarm call.

Breeding choruses usually erupt at night when the majority of the mating occurs. Rainy or humid overcast weather seems to provide conditions that make for the most active mating.

During their mating season, which is typically late spring and summer when the waters return, male Pig Frogs grunt their presence and territory, which sends a signal to any ripe and ready females in the neighborhood to come on over for a little *amplexus*.

Amplexus, *below*, consists of a male climbing on top of the female and clasping her. In response, she lays a swarm of up to 10,000 eggs in a floating film of transparent jelly, which he fertilizes. Then they part, and he resumes his calling for another mate.



Eggs are laid in relatively still, warm water, so they must develop on the surface in order to receive a steady supply of oxygen. Submerged or dried out eggs die.

The eggs hatch in two to three days and the tadpoles begin a one-year developmental sequence into frogs. The eggs appear to have no animal predators, so their only threat is the receding water.

Tadpoles in the northern range take a little longer to develop while those in the southern range (here) take a shorter time. The tadpoles are quite large, to five inches, with extremely long tails. At first they are a solid dark greenish color, but as they mature they become more colorful with yellow bellies, yellow spots on their sides, and greenish to black on top. After resorbing their tails and becoming air-breathing frogs, the adults remain in the same habitat as when they were tadpoles.

Pig Frogs are opportunistic feeders that will eat insects, worms, small amphibians, small crustaceans like snails and crayfish, and small reptiles.

In turn, they are food for all wading birds as well as for owls, hawks, alligators, and other carnivores.

Young Pig Frogs are uniformly dark but they can sometimes be dark

greenish. Adult Pig Frog colors range from blackish-brown and extremely dark olive green, to bright green, to yellow. Most of the time, there are scattered dark spots on the back. The belly is usually whitish but may also have dark spots, commonly toward the rear. Some males have bright yellow throats.

Adult male and female Pig Frogs can be distinguished by the tympanum (outer ear located just behind the eye). That of the male is noticeably larger than the eye while that of the female is about the same size or smaller than the eye.

Adult sizes range from three and a half inches to six and a half inches. Pig Frogs are the second largest frog in



Male, tympanum larger than eye, left; female, tympanum smaller than eye, right.



Florida, behind the Bullfrog. Although some Bullfrogs may be found in Southwest Florida, the southern tip of their range is typically around Tampa.

Pig Frogs have narrow, pointed heads – the snout is narrower and more pointed than that of a Bullfrog. Pig Frogs can be distinguished from other aquatic frogs in Corkscrew by their hind feet, which are fully webbed; the webbing on the longest toe extends almost all the way to the tip while webbing on the longest toe of other large frogs’ rear feet stops well before the tip.

Pig Frogs are aquatic frogs, so they will be found in permanent open waters of ponds, streams, lakes, rivers, swamps, and marshes. They may either float in open water or choose a station on or amid floating vegetation. They are much more aquatic in nature than Bullfrogs. They are found in the entire state of Florida and into southern and coastal South Carolina, Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana, and extreme eastern coastal Texas.