

## 29# Leopard Frogs

That was the song of a male leopard frog. Frogs are amphibians, living both on land and in water. If you are lucky you may hear them here and along the lakeshore path. But you may not, even in their mating season.

Frogs throughout much of Wisconsin are declining. They are sensitive to many environmental stresses and tell us about the health of the local environment.

Some of the threats are simply part of nature. Frogs are prey for just about everything. Eggs are tasty morsels for diving beetles and dragon fly nymphs. Snapping turtles and wading birds eat the tadpoles. Raccoons, garter snakes, and crows prefer the adults. Frogs are a part of the web of life.

But don't get the wrong idea. Frogs are far from defenseless. They hide using their camouflage coloration. They can jump more than ten times their length—often from water to land, or land to water to avoid a predator.

Frogs often have physical deformities such as shrunken legs or extra or missing legs. Imagine being a frog with a missing leg trying to get away from a raccoon.

These malformations form after the tadpole is infected with an immature, parasitic worm called a trematode. This same parasite causes "swimmers itch" in humans—fortunately, not a serious condition. Leopard frogs with malformations occur in Triangle Marsh only three quarters of a mile from here.

Unfortunately, malformations caused by the trematode, are more severe when the frog is weakened by pollutants such as pesticides. Thus, the prevalence of malformations can be an index of pollutants in the waters where they live.