



Water KIDZ

South Africa's water bodies are home to many wonderful animals, including frogs.

South Africa's waterbodies play home to a whole host of animals and plants, one of the most fascinating being frogs.



There are more than 7 000 species of frogs in the world.

Frogs are part of the family of animals known as amphibians. Amphibians are cold-blooded animals that spend part of their lives in water and part of their lives on land. Amphibians were among the first vertebrates (animals with backbones) to inhabit the Earth. They are the only vertebrates that go through metamorphosis, in other words, from tadpoles that breathe in water through gills to adults that have lungs which survive out of the water.

Frogs have adapted to habitats ranging from mountain tops to sea level and from forests to deserts, and some live entirely on land, while others prefer the water. South African frogs belong to 10 families, and 50% of the 115 or so species occur nowhere else but here.

One of the most interesting things about frogs is their call. Each species has its own distinctive mating call which the males use to attract females to breeding sites, and as frogs are generally more often heard than seen, this is a useful way of identifying species. Seeing a frog calling is quite an amazing sight. Their subgular flap (that is the elastic membrane underneath their jaw), expands and vibrates, giving off surprisingly loud noise for such a small animal.

According to Nick Evans from the Endangered Wildlife Trust, frogs also make distress calls if they are being harassed or

attacked. This is in the hope that the predator will get a fright and leave the frog alone. It may also warn other frogs of the danger.

You may have noticed how a large cacophony of frogs will fall silent in an instant; this is an anti-predatory response, usually elicited in response to detection of movement through vibrations, explains Nick. What a good security system to have at home – you know if the frogs shut up suddenly, something, or someone, may be afoot!

Besides being really beautiful and interesting, frogs are a very important part of nature. They act as both a predator (of insects) and prey (for birds, fish, reptiles and other animals). Frogs also play an important role in pest control by eating huge numbers of pesky insects such as mosquitoes, flies and ticks.

For scientists, frogs are bio-indicators, which means that their presence indicates a healthy environment. This is due to their semi-aquatic lifecycles and the fact that their semi-permeable skin make them particularly vulnerable to pollutants and other environmental stresses.

Unfortunately, all is not well with our frogs at all. As people pollute and destroy their homes, spread alien species and overhunt them for food and medicine, frogs are among the

most threatened animals on the planet. In South Africa, around 30% of frog species are Red Listed. This means they are threatened with extinction.

Frogs are quite harmless. Each species has its own distinctive sound and most frogs are active in the cooler hours of the night or dusk when the air moisture content is greatest, and insects such as moths and cockroaches are active.

Plant a frog-friendly garden

One of the best ways to help frogs survive is by planting a frog-friendly garden. You can start by installing a pond planted with marginal, floating and submerged aquatic plants. This will help attract frogs from all the different families. The flowers from these plants will also attract pollinating insects for the frogs to eat.

Remember to provide hiding places. Frogs, and especially toads, need a sheltered place to hide during the heat of the day, and also a place for hibernation during the dry season. Suitable shelters are beneath stones, in tree stumps or under logs. Rockeries are ideal for frogs.

Dense shrubbery is quite appropriate for frogs. In subtropical parts of the country, any dense, tallish planting will attract tree frogs. An outside light will attract insects, and toads will follow. In addition, by turning on the sprinkler for a few minutes just before dusk during the summer evenings you will make your garden attractive to frogs. Avoid spraying your garden with toxic chemical pesticides and herbicides.

Having frogs call in the garden is one of the many privileges we have living in Africa. It is so much better than the sound of traffic or blaring music coming from a house party! So sit back, relax, and enjoy nature's music instead.

Froggie feasts

Frog festival, Chrissiesmeer

The Chrissiesmeer wetlands, in Mpumalanga, are home to 13 species of frogs. Once a year amphibian lovers hop to this town for a night of frogcatching for scientific research. To find out more, visit: www.chrissiesmeer.co.za

Leap Day for Frogs

In February each year the Endangered Wildlife Trust (EWT) hosts Leap Day for Frogs to celebrate and highlight the challenges of survival that frogs face in South Africa. Various activities are organised on this day. To find out more, visit: <http://www.leapdayforfrogs.org.za/>



Frogs are part of the amphibian family of animals that spend part of their lifecycle in water.

Facts about frogs

- There are over 7 000 known amphibian species in the world, of which 6 277 are frogs (the other being salamanders and caecilians)
- Not all frogs have tadpoles. There are many terrestrial frog species that emerge as froglets directly from the egg, bypassing the tadpole stage altogether. For example, the Bush Squeaker, which is found in KwaZulu-Natal.
- Most adult frogs have lungs like humans. However, amphibians have permeable skin that allows them to absorb water and oxygen directly from the environment.
- South Africa's smallest frog is also one of its most threatened. The Micro Frog, which only grows up to a length of 18 mm, only occurs in four localities in the southwestern Cape.
- South Africa's largest species, the Giant Bullfrog, can reach 25 cm and weighs in at 1.4 kg. Up to 80% of this species' habitat has been lost in urban areas, particularly Gauteng.
- A person that studies amphibians is called a batrachologist.

Source: EWT



A Tremolo Sand frog (Tomoterna cryptotis).