



Gray Tree Frog

Taking a Closer Look at Gray Tree Frog!

By Merrill Tawse

At GNC, in the tank at the end of the Hellbender counter, we house several species of amphibian at one time. Known to have inhabited this enclosure are wood frogs, toads and eastern tree frogs. Occasionally we have had tree frog escapees from this tank. Lets take a closer look at these nimble woodland amphibians.

The Common Gray Tree Frog (*Hyla versicolor*) and the Cope's Gray Tree Frog (*Hyla chrysoscelis*) are two species that are identical in appearance. Their ranges overlap extensively. Because of these factors they usually cannot be told apart in the field, however there is a chromosomal difference and the Cope's has a faster trill than the Common Gray. The individuals we have had inhabiting our tank are the Common Gray.

The size of the Gray Tree Frog is moderately large as compared to other members of the tree frog family.

They are fit for a life in the trees from their long limbs right down to their toes which end in adhesive discs that help them cling to twigs and bark. Nocturnal, they live in trees and descend to chorus and breed.

The Common Gray can make a pronounced change in its skin color depending on light conditions, moisture, temperature, and stress and/or activity level. The colors range from greenish to brownish to gray. The skin texture is grainy. The under surfaces of the thighs is bright orange or golden yellow mottled with black. This is called the "flash color" and is used to fool predators. If discovered they leap away displaying the bright flash colors. Upon landing, the colors disappear on the inner thigh and the tree frog remains motionless, which confuses predators by disrupting their search image.

Its voice is a flutelike resonating trill. It has been likened to the call of the red-bellied woodpecker. The speeds of the trills are slowed by colder weather. Male tree frogs have a vocal sac under their throat that is round and balloon-like when inflated.

Tree frogs come out of hibernation in April and are active until late October. When cold weather arrives they find shelter under bark, roots, leaves, logs or in hollow trees. They are freeze tolerant. Their bodies can freeze solid and survive.

In the spring the males move toward breeding sites and establish small territories. Trills are repeated several times a minute. Aggressive calling and confrontation defend territories. A female can lay up to 1,500 eggs in small floating clusters of 30-40. The tadpoles hatch in 4 to 5 days and metamorphosis occurs in 6 to 9 weeks. They do not reach sexual maturity until their second summer.

We have had many of tree frogs here at GNC. Because of their habit of living in trees and their ability to climb slick surfaces, they usually stay high in the tank either on the sides or on the branch. This makes escape quite easy if the lid is even slightly ajar. Please help us by making sure the lid in the tank is secure as you pass by and take a closer look.