

WILDLIFE OF VICTORIA PARK
by John Serrao

The Greenhouse Frog

It seems that not every alien animal that takes up residence in Florida becomes invasive and problematical. For example, we have 3 species of frogs that were introduced into our state from tropical regions and are now firmly established here. Two of them – the Cuban tree frog and the cane, or giant, toad – are major pests that consume our smaller native frogs and can even poison our pets with their toxic skin secretions. But the third alien frog has apparently taken up a niche that was unoccupied by any of our native species and – so far – hasn't negatively affected them.

The greenhouse frog is a tiny, one-inch amphibian with warty brown or rusty skin that is either mottled or vaguely striped. Its name comes from its preference for living in greenhouses, plant nurseries, and gardens, but now it can be found anywhere throughout Florida's moist forests and wetlands. It almost always remains hidden beneath mulch, moist leaf litter, logs, flower pots, door mats, boards, and other objects until darkness, when it emerges to search for tiny insects.

If you've ever lifted an outdoor potted plant or mat and noticed a tiny creature darting away with very quick, low hops, you probably saw one of these West Indian natives. It's easy to mistake it for a cricket – even the male's soft chirps on rainy evenings are very insect-like.

The greenhouse frog is the only frog in the United States that doesn't go through an aquatic stage. Eggs are deposited by females in moist soil or mulch, and the tadpoles remain inside their eggs until they transform into 4-legged frogs. Then they break out and enter the world as miniatures of their parents and never enter the water.