



Atlantic Coast Leopard Frog



Up until a few years ago we were quite happy with our 15 frog and toad species here in New Jersey. It was to our surprise, and perhaps a surprise to some in the amphibian and conservation community, that we needed to revise our list and add two new members: the green treefrog and the Atlantic Coast leopard frog. The green treefrog, considered a species whose range is currently expanding in the U.S. was noted here in 2011. Just the next year in 2012 a publication explained that the genetics of leopard frogs found in the northern part of the state were not previously known to science, and just this past fall a follow-up paper more formally described the new frog and gave it a name. What makes the Atlantic Coast leopard frog's story so interesting is that it's been here in our wetlands and ponds for perhaps thousands of years and is just now redefining what we know about leopard frogs here at home and along the east coast of the country.

The naming of the Atlantic Coast leopard frog, formally *Rana (Lithobates) kauffeldi*, is in reverence to the work of famed herpetologist Carl Kauffeld, who had first noted the possibility of a new leopard frog species in the region back in the 1930s. While Kauffeld and other ecologists over the years each had a hunch, the modern technologies available to us, like DNA analysis, ultimately allowed researchers to clearly show the Atlantic Coast leopard frog was something unique. Now 80 years later, we're attempting to sort out where this new species lives, what its needs are to thrive and persist, and revise the range of what we thought was our only leopard frog state resident, the southern leopard frog. We now believe the southern leopard frog is limited to the more sandy and acidic Pine Barrens habitat while the Atlantic Coast leopard frog not only hugs our southern coastline down and around Cape May, but also up through the Delaware Bay to wetlands near Trenton. In the north, the Meadowlands and Great Swamp and Wallkill NWRs also feature the new frog.

During our investigations into the historical documentation of leopard frogs here in New Jersey we also came upon museum specimens collected by Kauffeld himself in the 1930s of a third species, the northern leopard frog, from a handful of areas in Northwest NJ. As we learn more about the Atlantic Coast leopard frog, revise the distribution of our native southern leopard frogs, and search for remnant populations of the northern leopard frog we'll keep in mind to write down our number of frogs in pencil – and hope that through our conservation efforts that number will remain the same – or even grow!

More information can be found here:

<http://njfishandwildlife.com/ensp/leopardfrog.htm>

Written by and photos by Brian Zarate - ENSP, NJ Division of Fish and Wildlife

