

Celebrating Ohio Wildlife: American Bullfrog

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“Jeremiah was a bullfrog, he was a good friend of mine.”. How many of us want to sing along to that song right now? How many have it stuck in their head now? As you may have guessed, we are once again looking at some of the amazing wildlife that find a home right here in Ohio. Over a series of articles, we have covered animals such as the coyote, river otter, hummingbird, deer, fox, and many more. This week, we turn our focus to an animal of the amphibious kind, the American Bullfrog (if you didn't already guess by the first line!). Where does this animal live? What are their requirements for survival? What do they eat and who eats them? All those questions and more will be answered so be sure to read on!

According to the Ohio Department of Natural Resources (ODNR), the bullfrog is the largest frog living in North America and is well-known for its deep “*jug-o'-rum*” sound that is heard well throughout the forests, marshes, and slow-moving streams across Ohio starting in the latter part of April and continuing on through late summer. As many people know, the favorite meal of a frog is those yummy insects. How do they get these insects? With their long tongues of course! This long, sticky, muscular tongue that is attached to the front of their mouth allows the bullfrog to capture their prey with relative ease. Bullfrogs will stick this tongue out, wrap it tightly around their prey of choice, and then bring the tongue with their meal into their mouth, but we are not done.

To help move the food down their throat, frogs will use their eyes. Once their meal is in their mouth, the eyes will sink into the frog's head which will help to push the meal down the frog's throat. As part of the bullfrog's meal, they will also eat things such as crayfish, mice, other frogs, beetles, and perhaps some spiders. For the most part, this animal prefers a swampy environment that offers standing, shallow water to which is found here in Ohio.

It is important to know about frogs that their skin must stay wet or moist for them to survive. They get half the air they need by breathing it in through their nose while they get the other half of the air they need by soaking up water through their skin and obtain oxygen. If their skin should dry out, the frog can die because they do not have all the air they need to survive. Frogs rely on this extra oxygen they absorb through their skin particularly when they are underwater.

Have you ever picked up a frog before? You may have noticed the frog has a bit of a slimy feel to it. That is because the frog's skin secretes a mucus that helps to keep its skin moist. According to ODNR, there are some differences to take note of when trying to distinguish a male and female bullfrog by paying attention to the size of their eardrums. The female bullfrog has an eardrum that is comparable in size to their eyes while the males will be smaller.

Now let us talk about the life cycle of the bullfrog. As spring approaches, the female will lay thousands of eggs in a foamy film. According to ODNR, tadpoles will emerge about four days following fertilization of the eggs by the male and will appear in lengths up to about six inches growing at a rapid rate. It can sometimes take a few years before the tadpole will turn into the adult bullfrog. Prime breeding season for the bullfrog will generally be from May through July. For the most part, the bullfrog is solitary yet possessive over its territory. ODNR notes that the bullfrog will become increasingly aggressive and loud and splash the water during their breeding season.

Some people often ask what happens to frogs in the winter. According to ODNR, bullfrogs will hibernate underwater by soaking up water through their skin to satisfy their oxygen needs. While they are hibernating, they will have a higher sugar content in their vital organs which essentially works in the same way as antifreeze that will protect vital organs. This basically means that a frog could be frozen in a block of ice, yet they are still alive!

Have you seen or even heard a bullfrog before? Let us know we would love to hear your stories or see some neat pictures! While we have gained a lot of helpful information on the bullfrog, we are not even close to the number of animals that call Ohio home. Stay tuned for future installments of our Ohio Wildlife Series!