

Amphibians and Reptiles at Winnetka Park District Golf Course

Reptiles and amphibians in Winnetka are quite common, but there is pressure on their structural habitat as we coexist. The concern of this project is to raise awareness for some of the reptiles and amphibians, and if we can, make a better environment for their continued success and our pleasure to see them.

Here at WPD Golf Course, in order to enhance the quality of their habitat and increase general understanding for these critters, we have created turtle egg laying areas, rafts for turtle sunning in ponds and planted lilies for increased cover for frogs. Our hope is that we will all respect and enjoy the flora and fauna around us.

Painted Turtles (Midland: *Chrysemys picta*, *C. p. marginata*, and Western: *C. p. bellii*)



Painted Turtle (pictured left) with different species' habitats above

These reptiles grow to be 4-10 inches long, and have striped shells, necks and heads. Their coloring is typically a yellow shade, but can sometimes be a rusty red. They are known for the intricate patterns on their shells and heads, so keep an eye out for any awesome looking lines in the water!

Facts - Painted Turtles are some of the most common reptiles across North America. Living in any type of fresh water, they can be found almost anywhere. Their diet consists of aquatic plants and small aquatic creatures. They make V shaped nests in light sandy soil and lay their eggs between mid-May and July. Living up to 40 years, they return to the same nests every year.

Painted turtles are most vulnerable when they are young, as they are consumed by snappers, herons, hawks and many types of mammals. These creatures defend themselves by kicking, scratching, biting and in some cases urinating. Unlike popular belief, the turtles can even flip themselves right side up when on their backs.

The nests are ransacked and robbed of their eggs by a multitude of creatures including skunks, snakes, raccoons and many other small woodland critters. Their diet consists of plants, animals and insects, dead or alive! On the WPD Golf Course, one can find Painted Turtles in and out of the many ponds during the day only. They bask in the sun because they are cold blooded. So, by creating floating platforms in ponds, turtles now have a safer spot to warm themselves and stay off the path and out of golf play.

During the winter, painted turtles hibernate in muddy bottoms of ponds. Sand was placed next to the ponds so that the turtles can lay their eggs safely without entering sand traps on the golf course. The female turtles are up to 7 ounces heavier than the males so that they are capable of carrying eggs.



Turtle Rafts

These design build rafts are for the turtles to bask in the sun to warm up. Looks for turtles on top of them in the ponds!



Egg Laying pits

These aerated sand pits are designed to receive and hatch turtle eggs. Watch for female turtles as they lay eggs, and baby turtles when they hatch!



Snapping Turtles (*Chelydra serpentina*)

Like a mini-dinosaur, these reptiles grow to be 10-20 inches long and can weigh up to 35 pounds and live over 30 years! Their color varies from olive, gray, brown and black and are often hard to spot when under water.

Facts - Snapping turtles live in almost any body of water, but they prefer muddy and shallow ponds for cover and to feed. They have a very muscular neck with a highly powerful beaklike jaw, which gives its foreboding name. They eat all sorts of aquatic vegetation as well as fish, frogs, insects and crayfish.

On the WPD Golf Course, snapping turtles predominantly lay their eggs in the edges of the sand traps and by tall natural grass. By creating aerated soil/sand pits placed next to the ponds, the Snappers can lay their eggs safely without entering sand traps on the golf course. At WPD, the eggs that are laid in the sand traps can get translocated as they are found and brought to safer areas. Creating a safe egg laying site benefits golf play and helps with survivability of newly hatched turtles.



Amphibians - Frogs and Toads

There are mainly two types frogs and also common toads here. We are thrilled to have frogs and toads around as they consume mainly bugs! The population of frogs in the US has decreased substantially as habitats and other human influences have changed.

On the WPD Golf Course, this project is helping to bring back some of the healthy habitat for amphibians. Here, frogs and toads have less protection from birds and other dangers in and around the ponds, compared to natural environments. To help remedy this, water lilies were planted, and additional logs and structures were placed in the ponds. The amphibians will have a growing and thriving environment to live in, as well as places to hide when escaping predators.

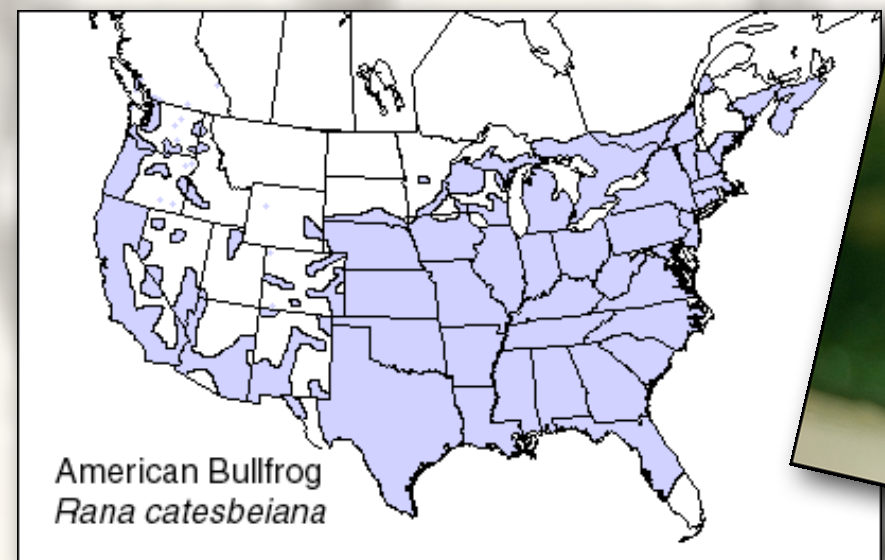
Bullfrogs (*Rana-catesbeiana*)

Bullfrogs are green, olive or brown in color and grow to 3-6 inches long (with legs measured up to 10 inches). They are easy to spot with their flat back and blotchy white underbelly.

Facts - Bullfrogs are very common around aquatic areas, as they spend their entire life very near to water. They hide in the water from their primary predators: fish, snakes and birds. The tadpoles of bullfrogs are easy to find in the ponds, and the frogs themselves are anywhere that there is cover. These amphibians develop next to and in ponds for up to two years, and can live over 10 years! They are usually spotted as they dive into the water for protection, possibly making their classic "jug-o-rum" sound, which has been said to sound like cattle lowing.

Their diet consists of small snakes, fish, small creatures and even at times, birds! They hunt at night, lying in wait for a meal to come along; the unlucky prey, when sighted, is pounced upon and swallowed in one big gulp. When the ground freezes, they dig a burrow and hibernate for the winter.

American Bullfrog and their North American habitat:



Spring Peepers (*Pseudacris crucifer*)



These small frogs grow up to 1 1/4 inches long. The color of their skin varies from yellow, orange and brown, almost all of which have detailed intricate designs on their skin.

Facts - Peepers live in woodlands located near freshwater, primarily ponds and marshes. They can be identified best by their loud shrill croak, their unique mating call. Spring Peepers are equipped with a vocal sac that expands and deflates to generate a distinct chirping sound. Their bird-like chorus of chirping is most prevalent in the evening just before dusk. And as they are primarily nocturnal carnivores, they feed on small invertebrates, such as beetles, ants, flies and spiders.

Interestingly enough, these frogs can live up to three years. The map below shows their habitat in North America.

Spring Peeper and their North American habitat:



Frog Cover!

Water lilies (pictured below) have been planted in four ponds to provide protection for frogs as well as add fauna to the ponds.



Toad

(*Bufo woodhousei*)



Toad (*Bufo americanus*)



Toads are small and stubby, usually a brown or gray color. They grow from 2-4.5 inches long, and are known for their dry and lumpy skin.

Facts - Toads live in dry places, but also dwell in insect heavy locations, which sometimes includes around ponds. A group of toads is called a Knot. The bumps (not warts - a common misconception) on their skin help to camouflage the critters in their habitat and protect them from predators. Because of their short legs, they are more known for walking than hopping.

They can be found at the golf course around the ponds eating and along pathways and fairways absorbing sunlight. They eat at night and their call is a sustained high musical trill. They can live up to 30 years!

Thank you to everyone who helped make this project possible! Volunteers came from Winnetka BSA Troop 20, New Trier football and track and field players, friends, family and golf patrons.

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