REED FROG

There are over 200 species of reed or sedge frogs belonging to three large genera (*Hyperolius*, *Leptopelis* and *Afrixalus*) and 11 smaller ones. Most live in sub-Saharan Africa and Madagascar, but there is one species found only in the Seychelles. Many reed frogs are attractively patterned and colored and can change color in response to temperature or background. They are mostly small species, ranging from about ⅝ to 3¼ inches (1.5–8.2 cm) long, and have expanded toe-pads. The males are distinctive for their very large vocal sacs, which may be two or three times the size of the body when inflated.

Polymorphic frogs

The five-lined reed frog, *Hyperolius quinquevittatus*, from Angola to Tanzania, is a pale, almost golden brown, with five mauve-brown stripes running down its back. These stripes are more distinct in the male than in the female. The painted or marbled reed frog, *H. marmoratus*, often has intricate patterns on its back. However, in common with some other reed frogs, the painted reed frog is polymorphic, meaning that there is extreme variety within the species, and even within populations. For example, there may be striped, speckled or plain individuals. They may also be black and white, black and green, black and yellow, brown and yellow as well as several other variations. This made species identification very difficult until genetic studies were used. The painted reed frog ranges from the South African cape to Zimbabwe and Angola. At the southern end of its range it is green or brown with light green spots, each spot ringed with a narrow black line. By contrast, the rare green reed frog, *H. tuberilingius*, is a plain brilliant green with no markings, but is white on the belly and pink on the hind legs.

The two spiny reed frogs, the small golden spiny reed frog, *Afrixalus spinifrons*, and the brown and white spiny reed frog, *A. fornasinii*, live up to their name, for minute spines can be seen on their heads and backs. They differ from the other reed frogs in that the pupil of the eye is vertical instead of horizontal.

Varied habitats

Habitat is very much dependent on genus and species. Most hyperoliids, for example, are arboreal frogs, usually found in reed margins of lakes and ponds. Those of the *Kassina* genus, on the other hand, live among grasses, but still climb fairly well. Other genera, *Chrysobatrachus* and *Tornierella*, for example, are mostly terrestrial and are often found under rocks, while some

Species identification is sometimes difficult with reed frogs because some species, including the painted reed frog pictured below, exhibit a wide variety of colors and patterns.

REED FROGS

CLASS **Amphibia**

ORDER **Anura**

FAMILY **Hyperoliidae**

GENUS **14 genera**

SPECIES **206, including small golden spiny reed frog, *Afrixalus spinifrons*; brown and white spiny reed frog, *A. fornasinii*; arum frog, *Hyperolius horstockii*; and painted reed frog, *H. marmoratus***

ALTERNATIVE NAMES
Sedge frog (all species); marbled reed frog (*H. marmoratus* only)

LENGTH
⅜–3¼ in. (1.5–8.2 cm)

DISTINCTIVE FEATURES
Often brightly colored; expanded toe-pads; some species polymorphic (exhibit extreme variability of appearance within species). Male: very large vocal sacs.

DIET
Insects

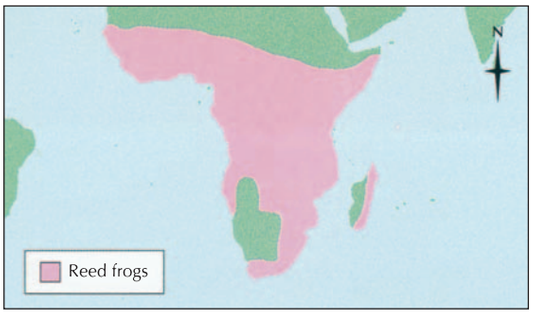
BREEDING
Variable; eggs may be laid underwater, on the stems of reeds, or in burrows near water

LIFE SPAN
Not known

HABITAT
***Hyperolius* species: arboreal; found among reed margins of lakes and ponds. *Kassina* species: live among grasses. Other genera mainly terrestrial; often found under rocks. *Leptopelis* species: sometimes semiarid country.**

DISTRIBUTION
Sub-Saharan Africa and Madagascar; *Tachycnemis seychellensis*: Seychelles

STATUS
Many species common



A pair of painted reed frogs on a floating water plant, South Africa. Species of this genus climb well and are usually found among reeds along the margins of ponds, pools and lakes.

Leptopelis species live in semiarid conditions and burrow to avoid drying out. Reed frogs are generalist insectivores and feed on flying insects such as mosquitoes. The arum frog, *H. horstockii*, lives in flowers of the arum lily, where its ivory color makes it inconspicuous. It is also overlooked by insects that are attracted by the scent of the arum lily and so fall prey to the frog. When arum lilies are not in flower, the frogs move to other plants and change their color to dark brown to fit their new background.

Varied breeding habits

Breeding habitats also vary with species. Reed frogs of the genus *Hyperolius* have small, unpigmented eggs. Those species living in southern Africa spawn among submerged aquatic vegetation, but some West African species attach their eggs to stems of reeds or grasses and the tadpoles slip down into the water after hatching. In the arum frog, clusters of about 30 eggs are laid among water plants, and the surrounding jelly is sticky so the eggs become camouflaged with mud. Once they hatch, the tadpoles feed on minute floating organisms. The painted reed frog lays its eggs in clusters on stones or plants underwater.

In the spiny reed frogs, meanwhile, the eggs are stuck to a leaf, which is folded over to make a protective tube. The small golden spiny reed frog lays its eggs underwater while the the brown and white spiny reed frog lays on plants above the water. Arid-dwelling *Leptopelis* reed frogs spawn in burrows or small depressions near water and the tadpoles wriggle into the water to develop.