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Cuban Treefrog - *Osteopilus septentrionalis*



The largest treefrog in North America is the Cuban treefrog (1.5 to 5 inches in body length), however it is **not native to North America**. This species was introduced to southern Florida from the Caribbean and has continued to spread in Florida. Cuban treefrogs have been documented as far north as Cedar Key on the Gulf Coast, Jacksonville on the Atlantic Coast, and the Orlando area in mid-Florida.

Many people have reported that after they first noticed a Cuban treefrog in their yard, they noticed the gradual disappearance of the other frogs, toads and even lizards. That's because Cuban treefrogs are voracious eaters -- and unfortunately they **eat** Florida's *native* frogs, toads, and lizards, in addition to insects and spiders. In fact, Cuban treefrogs are *SO* successful at taking over habitat and eating Florida's native species that they are considered an **invasive exotic (non-native) species** -- they are a threat to the biodiversity of Florida's native ecosystems and wildlife. You can help.

The **distinguishing characteristics** of the Cuban treefrog are: Size of the adults (up to 5 inches in body length, much larger than native Florida treefrogs);

Enormous toe pads (larger than toepads of native treefrogs in Florida); *Bumpy* skin on the back, like skin of a toad; and Skin on top of head is fused to skull (see test described below).

Cuban treefrogs can be highly variable in **color** -- from pale tan/pale green without any markings to dark green or brown with an even darker color pattern on the back and legs. Sometimes they almost look white when they are inactive or cold. See additional photos on page 3.

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Preferred Habitat: This species prefers habitat that is moist and shady -- in trees, shrubs or around houses. It is commonly found near ornamental fishponds and well-lit patios.

Similar treefrog species: Squirrel treefrogs and Green treefrogs. Both of these species are native to Florida.

The **breeding season** lasts from May to October. The voice, or call, of the Cuban treefrog is variably pitched, slightly rasping or like grating stone. Male frogs call in hopes of attracting a female. Cuban treefrogs will lay eggs in any body of standing water -- from a small bucket to a fishpond, even in a chlorinated swimming pool.

If you are bothered by the calling of frogs during breeding season, first buy earplugs. Then turn out all outdoor lights around your house. Lights attract insects, and insects attract frogs. If the frogs don't move elsewhere after several nights, then try erecting a light as far as possible from your house -- hopefully the frogs will go over to that light to feed on insects, etc. There is no frog repellent or chemical to use to keep them away from your house. If the above methods don't work, buy better ear plugs and run a fan in your bedroom to create "white noise" to help drown out the calling of frogs. If all else fails, you can write us at extension@wec.ufl.edu. We may have a few odd but successful ideas reported to us by sleepless, creative folks in the past.

What You Can Do for Florida

Due to the destructive effects Cuban treefrogs have on native species of amphibians and reptiles, many biologists recommend that Cuban treefrogs be euthanized/killed. That's harsh, but true. We recommend a humane method of euthanasia for amphibians. Just make SURE the frog you have is a Cuban treefrog before euthanizing it (see the test suggested below). **A humane method for euthanizing amphibians:**

Purchase a small tube of benzocaine ointment, which is used in humans as a painkiller for toothaches. There are several well-advertised brands as well as much less expensive store brands (generic brands). Simply take a strip of ointment about 1 inch long (perhaps more for larger frogs) and spread it down the midline of the neck and back of each frog. In 5-10 minutes the animal will be groggy; in 15-20 minutes it should be unconscious, and in about 30-40 minutes it will be close to dead or dead. At this point, put the frog in a plastic container and freeze it for 3 days. Why? Because we want to ensure that the frog dies -- we don't want a heavily drugged frog to be buried and later wake up 2 feet underground. *That* would not be humane. After 3 days, dispose of the carcass by burying it deep enough so that a pet or wild animal will not dig it up, or place it in a plastic bag and put it in the trash.

Freezing is a humane way to kill amphibians because their bodies go into a state of torpor (metabolism slows way down) -- just as they do in cold weather outside. If the cold weather is short in duration, the frogs will come out of their torpor state. However, after an extended time in freezing temperatures, the frogs die.

A good test to determine if a frog is a Cuban treefrog is to grasp the frog firmly, but gently, and try to move the skin around on the top of the frog's head with your fingertip. **The skin on the head of a Cuban treefrog is fused to the top of the skull and won't move.**

Be sure to wash your hands after handling any frog or toad. They all secrete a slimy film to protect their skin, but the secretions of some species, like Cuban treefrog, can irritate the skin and eyes of some people.



Photo by Blake Meinecke.

Cuban treefrogs can change color: the one in the photo *above* is tan with a faint darker pattern on back and legs.

In the photo on the *right*, you can see the pattern on the back and legs very clearly, and the base (overall) color is a greenish brown.



Photo by Tom and Sally Elliott.



Photo by Leanna Powers.

At times, Cuban treefrogs appear to be almost white (photo *above*). Note the bumpy skin texture on the back.
