



Southern Bell Frog



Rice farms provide vital habitat for numerous species in areas where many animals have suffered habitat loss or even faced extinction. The Southern Bell Frog (*Litoria raniformis*) is one such case, a little known about frog that has made its home in the rice farms throughout the rice growing region. The Southern Bell Frog relies on the rice industry for its survival.

Habitat

The Southern Bell frog is commonly located in swampy, irrigated areas, reservoirs, farm dams and the periphery of rivers. The frogs also live in rice bays, in artificial wetland surroundings, where they breed over the summer months. It is believed that this has assisted in the total preservation of the species.

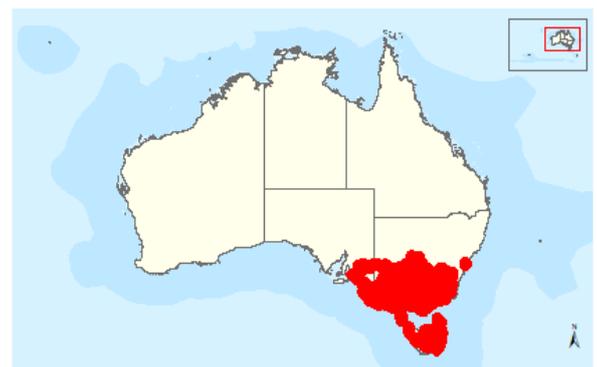
About the Species

Very little is known about the ecology and population biology of the species, but it appears that this species is highly vulnerable. There is evidence of a dramatic decline in this species throughout portions of its range in south eastern Australia. In some areas where it was abundant it has since disappeared. The Southern Bell Frog is listed as an endangered species in New South Wales.

The Southern Bell Frog feeds primarily on insects, but will also eat other small frogs. The biggest threats facing the Southern Bell Frog include birds, cold weather, and drought, the quality of water, herbicides and habitat destruction.

Distribution

Until the 1980s, Southern Bell Frogs were plentiful throughout the wetland habitats of south-eastern Australia. Formerly found in South East SA and the Murray Valley, most of Victoria and the ACT, south western NSW and northern and eastern Tasmania. Current reports estimate the once abundant Southern Bell Frog in wetland areas, are now becoming scarce. The species has completely disappeared from the ACT and the southern tablelands of NSW and there are reports of serious decline and local extinctions in Victoria and SA. There are however, several large localities in parts of metropolitan Melbourne and in regional Victoria.



Source: Department of Environment



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Reasons for Decline

The reasons for the decline of Southern Bell Frogs in Australia are unknown. However, there appears to be very close links with decline in drought and recovery in wet years. A possible hypothesis is about the decline is their habit of basking, and so may be exposed to high levels of ultra-violet radiation.

It has been suggested that a herbicide containing a dispersant is directly responsible for some declines where it has been used around dams. In Western Australia, the tadpoles of a closely related species, *L. moorei*, have been found to be very sensitive to glyphosate (Bidwell and Gorrie 1995)

The preservation of the species is very important for the biodiversity of the environment in the rice growing region.

The Ricegrowers' Association of Australia has developed a plan to ensure that the biodiversity of the environment remains in the rice growing areas as much as possible. This plan is part of the Rice Environmental Policy which specifically focuses on rice production. The policy provides strategies and actions for the rice industry, including rice farmers, to identify and meet environmental challenges and implement appropriate change.

