Eastern Snapping Frog (*Cyclorana novaehollandiae*)

Also known as New Holland Frog, Northern Water-holding Frog, North-eastern Water Holding Frog, Wide-mouthed Frog

This is the most conspicuous frog of our drier, more open habitats during the wet season. It is one of the frogs you are most likely to see on the road once you leave the moist coastal and highland forest - the others are the Common Tree Frog (*Litoria caerulea*) and the Ornate Burrowing Frog (*Limnodynastes ornatus*). Unfortunately for many of these frogs, they look like Cane Toads from a distance and I suspect many would be run over on the highway. Specimens are often found under ground debris alongside cane toads. It is not known whether they prey on smaller Cane Toads.

Figure 1. Plain specimen from Mareeba Wetlands

So you are wondering why it is called the Eastern Snapping Frog? Well so was until one day I found one and asked this question of the group that was accompanying me. As I was asking the question I put my finger near it and it promptly bit my finger! Question answered!

Eastern Snapping Frogs are a squat, solid frog, growing to approximately 10 cm in length with a wide head & large mouth.

These frogs are highly variable in colour and pattern. They are usually some shade of brown above, from very pale to chocolate brown to yellowish or greenish and may be plain or mottled. Sub-adult specimens may be bright green.


Figure 2. Mottled C. novaehollandiae from Petford area.

They are at their most active after heavy rains, however they persist on the roads for a long time after the wet season, probably remaining active until it is either too dry or their food source runs low.

When this happens snapping frogs burrow down into the soil and remain dormant, utilising the fat reserves they have built up during their period of activity, and the large supply of water they have ingested prior to going “down below”. Their moulted skin forms a cocoon around them, leaving the only contact with the outside the nares (nostrils) to enable the frog to breathe, while reducing water loss. This behaviour along with the ability to drastically slow their metabolism, allows the frog to survive considerable periods, until enough rain has fallen to allow the frog to once again return to the surface to breed and feed up again.

Male frogs appear to start calling as soon as there is enough water to breed in. When enough rain falls to filter down to the depth where the frog has burrowed is the signal that there has been enough rain for the formation of the temporary pools and streams above. They only breed only once, at the start of the wet season – the rest of their stay above ground is spent feeding, to build up the fat reserves that will see it through to the next wet season.

Males call from right at the edge of the water. All the other frogs which utilise temporary pools & streams to breed keep their distance from snapping frogs as they are extremely voracious, eating virtually anything that moves including other species of frog. Captive specimens are known to eat mice.

They can occur in large numbers; the sound of large numbers of these frogs calling can be heard for very long distances.

Females lay up to 1000 eggs in slow moving or still waters. The eggs and tadpole can survive in very warm water, which also speeds up their development. This is important as many of the temporary water-bodies in which they breed may also dry up very quickly. Large numbers of tadpoles can sometimes be found. One shallow lagoon contained many thousands of tadpoles swimming around the shallows. Many

of these were feeding upon termites from submerged broken mounds (probably stepped on by cattle). Also amongst these tadpoles was a very pale, almost albinistic individual.

Figure 5. Pale tadpole from Goose Lagoon west of Croydon.

Figure 6. Metamorphlings.

Figure 3. Green sub-adult specimen from Mareeba Wetlands.

Threats to this species include pigs, overgrazing, disease and climate variation resulting in unreliability of rainfall.