

Adrian's Reptile World

Notes on keeping and breeding the Australian Green Tree Frogs

By Adrian Hemens

DESCRIPTION:

At 13cm long, the white lipped tree frog (*Litoria infrafrenata*) is Australia's largest tree frog and one of the largest in the world. It ranges in colour from bright green to brown with a white stripe along its lower lip. The Magnificent Green Tree Frog (*Litoria splendida*) comes in second at 12cm long and ranges in colour from a dark olive to bright green with scattered yellow or white blotches on the back. A large gland covers the top of its head. At 10cm, the Common Green Tree Frog (*Litoria caerulea*) is the smallest of the three species. It also ranges in colour from dark olive to bright green. The back and sides may be dotted with white spots.

DISTRIBUTION:

The White Lipped Tree Frog is found across Cape York Peninsula extending south along the east coast to Bowen. The Splendid Tree Frog occurs throughout the Kimberly range of Western Australia. The common Green Tree Frog has a very large range across the northern and eastern parts of Australia.

ECOLOGY:

All *Litoria* are nocturnal and spend the day hiding in a damp shady spot well out of the wind. In mid-summer they may become crepuscular (active just before sunset) especially if there has been a recent rainfall. However, they are generally nocturnal and when not engaged in courtship, they will hunt for their insect prey all night. The common Green Tree Frog will utilize habitat that has been impacted by human activity and will colonise human structures. The Magnificent Tree Frog and the White Lipped Tree Frog have also been known to inhabit human structures but not to the same extent. Generally not very active below 20 degrees Celsius, Green Tree Frogs can tolerate an amount of cooling during the winter months, especially the common Green Tree Frog.

DIET: Almost totally insectivorous in the wild. Prey includes beetles, cockroaches, moths etc.

BREEDING BIOLOGY: All three species produce many thousands of eggs in a single spawn usually in early summer. Pairs may remain in amplexus (mating embrace) for days until the female finds a suitable water body for spawning. Eggs are laid in still freshwater bodies that do not contain fish. Fertilization is external.

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CAPTIVE HUSBANDRY:

Green Tree Frogs are the best known of all Australia's frogs. They are commonly kept as pets and they can make excellent pets.

The best enclosure is a glass tank fitted with an escape proof top that will allow ventilation. Steel flyscreen mesh works well. A 3 foot tank will comfortably house up to 4 adult frogs. Even though Green Tree Frogs can withstand low temperatures, they should not be exposed to excessively low temperatures (i.e., below 10 degrees Celsius) for any length of time. An easy way to ensure that your frogs are always sufficiently hydrated and at the right temperature is to set up a large water body in their enclosure and heat it with an aquarium heater set at 25 degrees Celsius. When replacing or topping up your water be sure to remove the chlorine before allowing frogs access to the new water. This can be done by aerating it with an aquarium airstone for a day. An aquarium filtration system is useful to keep the water clean but not essential if you carry out regular water changes. Frogs need exposure to UV light for 6-8 hours a day so you should provide a commercially available full spectrum 5% UV bulb if sufficient natural light does not penetrate the tank.

The tank should be planted with sufficient broad leafed fake or real plants to give the frogs cover and make them feel secure. Bromeliads, orchids and palms do well in a humid environment and the frogs will generally not disturb them much. Sphagnum moss works well as a substrate.

In captivity, Green Tree Frogs should be fed insects such as crickets and woodies. They will happily eat small mice and strips of meat but this should be avoided as eventually such a diet will lead to gout and kidney failure. Insects should be available at all times for young frogs and adults should be fed three times a week. Insects should be dusted with a good calcium supplement every second time they are offered. Variety is the spice of life even for a frog, so treat them with flies or moths once in a while. During the breeding season, the odd pinkie or two probably won't hurt and will help to boost the females condition. Spawning may occur spontaneously in captivity but is very difficult to plan. Tadpoles can be raised on a diet of frozen lettuce and the odd fish food pellet. Young frogs will reach maturity in about 8 to 12 months if fed well.

All three species may reach 25 years of age in captivity.

References:

Amphibian Research Centre Information and Care Sheets.