

## HYLA RUBRA: A CASE OF ILLEGAL IMMIGRATION

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Daudins treefrog (*Hyla rubra*) is a species more commonly encountered in South America, and therefore when a specimen was found by my parents in Hexham market (Northumberland), it created quite a stir! This specimen had been expatriated as a result of taking refuge in a bunch of banana's which were subsequently exported by Fyffes. When the fruit was being sorted out in the shop the traveller leapt out, to the horror of the shop assistant, and was thrown onto the street, where my mother found it sitting on the edge of the curb.

This specimen settled down in captivity, and was identified with the help of the British Museum, as *Hyla rubra rubra* (Daudin, 1802). This subspecies is part of the *Hyla rubra-Hyla x-signata* complex, (Lutz, 1973). The animal was olive brown, on the dorsal surface, with two parallel dark dorsolateral stripes, separated by a cream interval. These stripes ran from the rear of the eyes, to the base of the hind limbs. The dark stripes were often interrupted by pale patches, characteristic to each individual, allowing them to be identified. There was also a thin stripe from the front of the eye to the nostril, and some dark barring on the hind-limbs. The ground colour varied in shade from dark brown to pale olive depending on the substrate, and degree of illumination of the vivarium. The skin was slightly verrucose.

At the time the first specimen was identified, I was unable to obtain much information on secondary sex characteristics, except that the females were larger, and the males of a preserved sample had slight vestiges of pigment on the chest. Subsequent publicity about the treefrog on television and in the local papers resulted in more specimens being found and sent to me, so that I received 10 more specimens between 1976 and 1978 from as far afield as London and Glasgow, all imported into Britain in the same manner as the original specimen. Observation of these specimens showed that the larger females (up to 35mm long) had a dirty white throat and belly, while the smaller males (the largest was 29mm long) had a yellow belly, getting paler to the posterior end of the animal. The throat was most brightly coloured, presumably due to the presence of the vocal sac. Further confirmation of the sex of these specimens was obtained when only the males were observed croaking. The sound was reminiscent of that produced by rubbing the edges of two 10p coins together, one held perpendicular to the other. The call was repeated at intervals of 1-2 seconds, and was not particularly loud.

When they first arrived the treefrogs were very thin, and often were rather weak, a result of a three week voyage at a temperature of about 50°F. All of the treefrogs given to me soon displayed an active interest in food, although the first attempts at feeding often failed. As they grew stronger they were more efficient at catching their prey. Flies up to the size of bluebottles, moths and small spiders were all taken readily, although mealworms were usually refused. I remember one small frog, about 20mm long, managing to swallow a large bluebottle almost its own size. They were very agile and food was often taken in mid-air. Obtaining food in the summer was easy, but in the winter they took bluebottles, obtained as "gentles" at a local fishing shop.

When maintained at room temperature they fed readily, but a slight increase in temperature was required to induce calling. They were largely corpuscular/nocturnal, although food was taken during the day when they were hungry. They survived well in captivity, with several specimens living for 3 years after importation. The main problem with them was that being so agile (much more so than the less streamlined European species of *Hyla*) they were prone to escape if presented with the opportunity.

I was unsuccessful in persuading them to breed, although the males called frequently, and a pair was observed in amplexus once. I no longer have any of these delightful amphibians, although they continue to appear in the country: I know of one that arrived in Scotland last year, but which died a few weeks after arrival. If anybody has succeeded in spawning this species, or has any information on their ecology in their native lands (the Guianas, and Brazil, mine came from Surinam — Dutch Guiana), I would be pleased to hear from them.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank Miss A.G.C. Grandison of the British Museum for help with identifying the first specimen.

## REFERENCE

Lutz, B. (1973). *Brazilian species of Hyla*. University of Texas Press, Austin & London.



### PLATE 1

Male Daudins treefrog (*Hyla rubra rubra*), the first specimen caught in Hexham, length — 25mm.