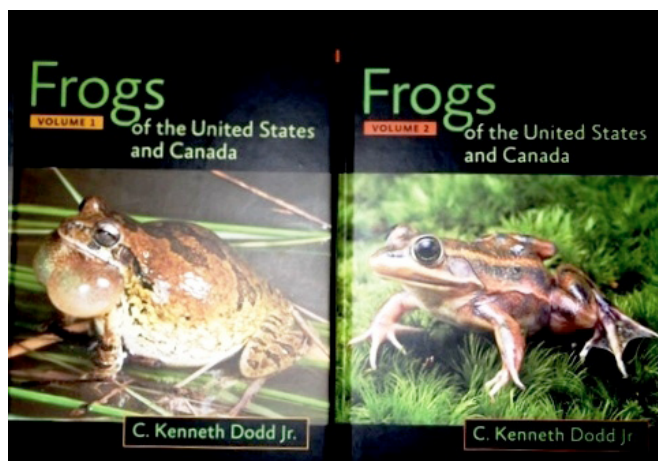


## Frogs of the United States & Canada

C. Kenneth Dodd Jr. (2013)

Baltimore, USA: John Hopkins University Press. 982 pp. in 2 vols.  
ISBN 978-1-4214-0633-6 and ISBN 978-1-4214-0633-0 (hardcover).



What a beautiful day! How tickled am I to be reviewing a really nice-looking book on North American anurans?! Well, pretty tickled actually because this synthesis is not by a jaded comedian from the Jam Butty Mines of northern England, but very well-respected US herpetologist C. Kenneth Dodd Jr. Though in two volumes, they are not stand-alone, the first volume contains a short introductory section and then hops right into species accounts on all the frogs, toads and treefrogs of the US and Canada arranged by family (Ascaphidae to Rhinophrynidae in the first volume). Volume 2 covers Ranidae, Scaphiopodidae and established non-natives, but is slightly the larger of the volumes as it also contains the extensive Bibliography! You will of course need this to delve into the individual studies these volumes cover. So the reason for division into two tomes is for practicality, ease of handling and because of the sheer detail and wealth of information contained in this immense work.

Unlike many such specialist books, the Introduction is not laboured (thank goodness), providing the essentials on frogs and toads, including anatomy, evolution and life history in just a few pages, before listing the protected species of the US and Canada and an interesting short section on the etymology of North American generic names (who knew that *Hyla* was named after an Argonaut?). The last part of the introductory section explains that the work is not intended as a field key or guide, but rather as a synthesis of the huge volume of work covering North American anurans...

The bulk of the two volumes is therefore devoted to substantial Species Accounts, each arranged in a standard format beginning with specific etymology and alternative scientific names. Identification of all life stages is then followed by distributional information with a map for every species. A nice feature of what might otherwise become visually “samey” over its full length is the inclusion of clear colour photos of both the animals and their habitats and, where needed, diagrams to aid species diagnosis (such as of the parotoid patterns of the various toads). If you’re interested in systematics and geographic variation, there’s plenty of that where it’s available (though of course as in the rest of the world the available knowledge varies according to the amount of work carried out to date on each species).

What I think many batrachogeeks like myself might find most fascinating, however, is the distillation of information (with references) on species’ habitats, ecology and breeding behaviour - with headed sections such as “Calling Activity and Mate Selection” separated out from simple “Reproduction”. These sections (and the work in general) will provide both a good read and a source for casual reference over time. As if that weren’t enough, there are data on diets, diseases, stressors and “Status and Conservation” to satiate you no matter what your particular area of interest. The conservation sections are a good way of ending each species account and put the state of knowledge on each species into contemporary context. No choruses of the Mexican burrowing toad have been heard within US borders since 1984, for example, though the species remains protected in Texas. In these troubling times of global amphibian declines, such status information might unfortunately prove of greatest long-term import and I have no doubt this particular Ken Dodd’s work will be a benchmark for comparisons for a while to come. So, if you’re interested in anurans, North American herpetology or species status, or just want to add a fine reference book to your collection, put away your tickling-sticks, get out your Christmas book tokens and get this on your shelf!

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