



Master-level California Red-legged Frog Field Workshop 2026

OVERVIEW

This field-only workshop will take place on five meeting dates distributed over a 12-month season. Meetings will be timed to coincide with specific California red-legged frog (*Rana draytonii*) life history stages: breeding/egg-laying, larval, post-metamorphic, and adult. Each participant will have the potential to observe egg masses, and to see and handle one or more of the three post-oviposit life stages of this threatened frog. Field sites will include the choice of at least four out of five offered locations (in El Dorado, Marin, Sonoma, Santa Clara, and San Benito Counties)—each chosen to sample occupied habitats through a transect across California in both historical (freshwater lagoons, coastal creeks, etc.) and novel (stock ponds, mitigation ponds, coastal dune pools, and other unexpected sites). Night surveys will also be conducted to help participants to distinguish among adult bullfrogs, western toads, Sierra treefrogs, and other sympatric nocturnal species, and to illustrate unique non-diurnal behaviors of the California red-legged frog.

With the exception of Altig and McDiarmid (2015), all required reading materials will be provided to paid participants before the course meetings. In addition to gear recommended in each session description, participants should supply their own boots, binoculars, flashlights, headlamps, etc. Disinfection stations may be provided but you should assume all sites are *Bd* positive and disinfection is a normal part of conducting surveys at every site.

Please read the prerequisites for participation at the end of this document.

INSTRUCTORS AND FIELD TIME

Instructors **Jeff Alvarez** and **Jeff Wilcox** have held recovery permits for many years and published more than 175 manuscripts from their research on California amphibians and reptiles, including more than 35 publications related to California red-legged frog. The instructor-to-participant ratio will be 6:1, allowing for close interaction at all stages of the course.

Participants will be expected to select dates and time periods from the pre-selected field-site options and are required to attend a total of four of the five offered segments. Each participant should expect to gain 20 to 25 hours of field experience in occupied habitat. Handling of



specimens will include instructional discussions on anatomy, morphology, sex determination and dimorphism, safe handling techniques, and more.

At the end of the workshop, each participant who attended four of the five sessions in good standing will receive a letter indicating the total number of hours of field time as well as the number of each life stage observed and handled.

COURSE BREAKDOWN

Session location and timing may change, based on site conditions and frog presence.

SESSION A: EGG MASS SURVEYS (TBD - February 2026)

Location and times: Sonoma County

Date/time: We will need to notify you through email (frog reproduction dependent)

Hours in the field: 4-5

Recommended field gear: waders, camera, polarized sunglasses

Breeding-season surveys will be conducted in occupied habitat at several sites where California red-legged frogs are extant, and where the eggs of red-legged frog, Pacific treefrog, and other species may be easily observed from the dry shoreline. Habitats in which the frogs reproduce will be discussed; the microhabitat associated with egg masses will be a focal topic. (Note: Participants will not be permitted to handle egg masses or to enter water bodies where egg masses are present).

Required reading:

Alvarez, J. A., D. G. Cook, J. L. Yee, M. G. van Hattem, D. R. Fong, R. Fisher. 2013. Comparative microhabitat characteristics as oviposition sites of the California red-legged frog. *Herpetological Conservation and Biology* 8:539–551.

Wilcox, J.T., M.L. Davies, K.D. Wellstone, and M.F. Keller. 2017. Traditional surveys may underestimate *Rana draytonii* egg-mass counts in perennial stock ponds. *California Fish and Game* 103:66–71.

SESSION B: LARVAL SURVEYS (15 or 18 APR 2026)

Location and times: Santa Clara County

Hours in the field: 4-5

Required field gear: Hip or chest waders, hat, sunglasses

Participants will be exposed to several aquatic sites where red-legged frogs normally breed in large numbers. Larval surveys will include dip-net surveys to collect the larvae of red-legged frog, western toad, Pacific treefrog, California newt, American bullfrog, and California tiger salamander. Habitat and microhabitat used by red-legged frogs and sympatric species will be discussed in detail.

Required reading:

Gosner, K. L. 1960. A simplified table for staging anuran embryos and larvae with notes on identification. *Herpetologica* 16:183–190.



Recommended reading:

Altig, R. and R. W. McDiarmid. 2015. Handbook of larval amphibians of the United States and Canada. Cornell University Press, Ithica, NY.

SESSION C: ADULT SURVEYS IN ATYPICAL HABITAT—DAYLIGHT AND NIGHTTIME (10 or 13 June 2026)

Location and times: El Dorado County

Hours in the field: 6–8

Required field gear: flashlight that meets survey protocol (this will be explained before the session), binoculars.

Visual daylight and nighttime surveys for adult red-legged frogs will be conducted in high-elevation habitat. Participants will be exposed to atypical habitats in which California red-legged frogs are extant and in which they breed. Participants should expect to see frog adults and larvae during the daytime and adults during nighttime spotlighting surveys.

Access to and collection of frogs varies on the specific conditions of the site. Instructors may do all collection, and handling will occur within small groups of participants.

Required reading:

Barry and G. M. Fellers. 2013. History and status of the California red-legged frog (*Rana draytonii*) in the Sierra Nevada, California, USA. *Herpetological Conservation and Biology* 8:456–502.

Corben, C., and G. M. Fellers. 2001. A technique for detecting eyeshine of amphibians and reptiles. *Herpetological Review* 32:89–91.

USFWS. 2005. Revised guidance on site assessments and field surveys for the California red-legged frog. 26pp.

SESSION D-1: (OPTIONAL) ADULT SURVEYS IN ATYPICAL HABITAT (26 or 29 JUL 2026)

Location and times: Marin County

Hours in the field: 4-5

Highly recommended field gear: hat, binoculars, polarized sunglasses.

Participants will conduct visual surveys in atypical habitats, including a significant walk, through coastal dune habitat where frogs might not appear to exist, but do. Adult frogs live and breed in these semi-haline environments, and participants should expect to see adults and juveniles.

Access to and collection of frogs varies on the specific conditions of the site. Instructors may do all collection. Handling will occur within small groups of participants.

Recommended reading:

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. 2002. Recovery plan for the California Red-legged Frog (*Rana aurora draytonii*). U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Portland, Oregon, USA. viii +173 p.



SESSION D-2: NIGHTTIME SURVEYS immediately following Session D-1 above (26 or 29 JUL 2026)

Location and times: Sonoma County

Hours in the field: 4-5

Highly recommended field gear: hat, binoculars, polarized sunglasses, flashlight, headlamp

Participants will conduct nighttime collecting surveys in creek and pond habitats. This portion of the workshop is completely optional. You will work as part of an on-going upland movement ecological study. This study will include hand collecting California red-legged frogs and foothill yellow-legged frogs. Some participants may be able to learn PIT tagging procedure. This experience often results in lots of handling.

You will be given the option to camp at the field stations (study site) or stay in a local hotel. Breakfast is provided the following morning.

SESSION E: POST-METAMORPHIC SURVEYS (14 or 17 OCT 2026)

Location and times: San Benito County

Hours in the field: 4-5

Required field gear: binoculars and polarized sunglasses highly recommended, headlamp or flashlight

During visual surveys of post-metamorphic frogs (i.e., juveniles), participants will be exposed to the variety of red-legged frog colors, patterns, and sizes at the post-metamorph stage. Frogs occurring at this atypical site will be a challenge to find and see. Additional discussion will include habitat management, specifically pond management for this declining species.

Required reading:

Allaback, M. L., D. M. Laabs, D. S. Keegan, and J. D. Harwayne. 2010. *Rana draytonii* (California red-legged frog) Dispersal. *Herpetological Review* 41:204–206.

MEETING DATES AND LOCATIONS

The varied timing and dynamic nature of reproduction and growth in California red-legged frogs requires that this workshop avail itself of windows of productive field time. This is particularly true for egg mass surveys, which must be timed to within three weeks of reproduction. For this reason, **make-up dates for Session A are not possible**; it is the responsibility of each participant to ensure her/his ability to attend. The peak of California red-legged frog reproduction changes annually, which makes this segment difficult to predict and schedule in advance. Typically, this species will oviposit after a period of rain following late December or January, but egg laying can occur as late as February or March. Twenty-four possible slots will be offered on a first-come, first-served basis. No other dates or times will be possible.



Scheduling for the remainder of the survey sessions will be set after reproduction has occurred in 2026. This will include two dates (Wednesday or Saturday) per session. Possible slots will be offered for each session on a first-come, first-served basis.

LOGISTICS

Each participant will be provided the location and time of the meeting for the session she/he has selected. It will be the responsibility of the participant to travel to each location and to arrive at the site on time or earlier. Due to accessibility restrictions on some sites, or a need to walk out of the sight of vehicles, late arrivals CANNOT be accommodated. Each field segment is predicted to be four (in one case, four to six) hours long, and each participant will be responsible for bringing her/his own meals, including drinks.

Remember that make-up dates are not possible (frogs are simply unyielding on this issue) and participants will be required to attend four of the five offered sessions in order to successfully complete the workshop. Participating in only a portion (i.e., fewer than four sessions) of the workshop cannot be accommodated for any individual.

SUCCESS CRITERIA

The instructors anticipate that each participant who attends four of the five sessions will observe California red-legged frog egg masses within their natural habitat and handle a minimum of 10 frogs of various life stages (adult, juvenile, and/or larval, depending on sessions attended). Note: Climatic changes in California make it nearly impossible to guarantee any particular combination of life stages handled, but prior experience at these sites leads us to be confident that the minimum requirements will be met.

Important: To the greatest extent possible, participants will be allowed to work closely with the frogs, but protection of the species is paramount; no mortality or injury to California red-legged frogs of any life stage is acceptable. The instructors reserve the right to exclude noncompliant participants from any or all habitats in order to protect the species. When conditions dictate (such as a danger of trampling or other harassment), instructors may enter a site alone to collect representative animals for brief “show and tell” before returning them to their habitat at the conclusion of the session.

PREREQUISITE

Participants are required to have completed a previous workshop where the California red-legged frog was a specific topic. This would include California red-legged frog workshops offered by Galen Rathbun and Norman Scott, or Greg Tatarian and Trish Tatarian (California Red-legged Frog Habitat Workshop does not qualify), the single species workshop by Jeff Alvarez and Jeff Wilcox (California red-legged frog – level I), or the Rare Pond Species Workshop by David Cook and Jeff Alvarez.

A Scientific Collecting Permit from the California Department of Fish and Wildlife is not required, but is highly recommended.



MATERIALS AND EQUIPMENT

With the exception of Altig and McDiarmid (2015), all required reading materials will be provided to all paid participants. It is the responsibility of each participant to come to each field segment prepared (i.e., having read the required materials and with the proper equipment). Dip nets will be supplied for each workshop attendee. Supplies and materials to decontaminate nets, boots, waders, etc., will be supplied at most field sites but you should come prepared with decontaminated waders and nets. Personal equipment such as boots, waders, binoculars, flashlights, headlamps, and other equipment will be supplied by the participant.

We HIGHLY recommend you invest in appropriate equipment. Although we do have equipment to loan, the number of nets and lights we have are limited. Having your own equipment will facilitate work that you engage in on your own, after securing your permit.

Recommended net:

<https://www.fishfarmsupply.ca/products/monorail-nets-with-fiberglass-handles>

We recommend **ONLY the 12” deep bag**, with either a 48-inch or a 72-inch handle.

Recommended headlamp or flashlight:

Flashlight:

Coast Crew PX1 LED Flashlight (or similar) (\$30)

<https://coastportland.com/collections/led-flashlights/products/coast-crew-px1>

Headlamp:

LedLenser MH10 with adjustable beam and light intensity (Use ONLY on medium setting)

https://www.basspro.com/shop/en/ledlenser-mh10-rechargeable-headlamp?hvarAID=shopping_googleproductextensions&ds_e=GOOGLE&ds_c=BPS%7CShop ping%7CSmart%7CCamping%7CGeneral%7CNAud%7CTopPerf%7CNMT&gclid=CjwKCAi A2fmdBhBpEiwA4CcHzaC69vAV82UYU_3qDV2KTeT5gDrc17LM6GZ3lgf1whgOoHAKthPsZBoCRP0QAvD_BwE&gclsrc=aw.ds



Registration Instructions

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Fill out all sections of the registration form. Complete a separate form for each registrant.

PAYMENT:

Make checks payable to “The Wildlife Project”, or fill out credit card information on the registration form. Only VISA or MasterCard credit is accepted. We accept Zelle—see QR code, or add the following number as a recipient (209-815-5660). If you need to use Venmo, PayPal, or other methods, please email us to make arrangements. No crypto-currency payments are accepted at this time.

Email or snail-mail registration form with your payment to:

Email: Workshops@TheWildlifeProject.com

Mailing address:
The Wildlife Project Workshops – Master CRLF
PO Box 188888
Sacramento, CA 95818

Confirmation: Confirmation of registration will be sent within two weeks via email or snail mail. The confirmation letter will indicate which time slot you may have received. A follow-up email will include reading materials, meeting locations of field trips, and suggestions about field gear.

Workshop Questions: For questions on registration email: Workshops@TheWildlifeProject.com

