



SPECIES SPOTLIGHT:

California Red-legged Frog

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One warm night in August, I was out surveying for California red-legged frogs (*Rana draytonii*) at a pond on the Sonoma Mountain Ranch Preservation Foundation near Petaluma in Sonoma County. Late in the summer, *R. draytonii* tadpoles are transforming, through metamorphosis, into juvenile frogs. They are plentiful around pond edges where cattle come in to drink. At least half of the dozen frogs I found that night, including one large adult, were hunkered down in the deep hoof prints that cattle leave in shoreline mud after drinking. These moisture-retaining spoor provide shelter from predators, a place from which to ambush prey, and a place for frogs to regulate temperature and humidity — all of which are functions critical to frog survival. Because the historic habitat for special-status species such as *R. draytonii* and the California tiger salamander (*Ambystoma californiense*) has been converted by residential, agricultural, and commercial development, the creation of stock ponds to support livestock grazing in open grasslands has unexpectedly provided surrogate habitat. Land managers must understand that cattle and grazing are not only compatible with some special-status species; they can be a necessary component for survival in altered landscapes.



This mission of the California Native Grasslands Association is to promote, preserve, and restore the diversity of California's native grasses and grassland ecosystems through education, advocacy, research, and stewardship.

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