

THREATS

Introduced tree frogs

Litoria species



Parks and Wildlife Service Tasmania

DEPARTMENT of TOURISM, PARKS
HERITAGE and the ARTS

The accidental importation of animals into Tasmania is not as widespread as in the past, however it still occurs. They mostly travel as stowaways on ships. One of the most common cases is the arrival of Queensland tree frogs on bananas.

How do they get here?

The frogs are accidentally kidnapped whilst resting in a bunch of bananas. Bunches of bananas are chopped from trees and taken to a washing room. They are then sprayed and soaked in water to remove sap. After this, they are packed into tightly-sealed crates destined for Tasmania's markets.

The frogs are easily overlooked as they are camouflaged on the unripe, green bananas. On arrival the frogs endure an ethylene gassing process that is required to ripen the bananas ready for the market. This does not harm the frogs as ripening bananas naturally produce ethylene gas.

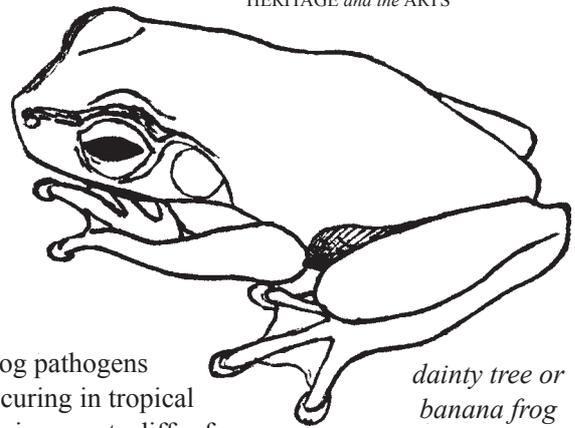
Frogs arrive in bananas

The frogs that usually arrive here belong to those species that live on banana plants. They are the green tree frog, the dwarf tree frog and the dainty tree or banana frog.

The frogs are found by quarantine inspectors, supermarket grocery workers and occasionally by people who buy the fruit. The common tree snake *Dendrelaphis punctulata* as well as lizards have also been accidentally imported with Queensland bananas in the past.

Frogs bring diseases

The import of mainland tree frogs is of major concern as it poses a threat to the health and survival of native Tasmanian animals and plants. This is primarily due to the possible spread of pathogens and disease.



Frog pathogens occurring in tropical environments differ from those in Tasmania. Our frogs and other animals may be vulnerable if exposed to these diseases.

*dainty tree or
banana frog*

Recently the fungus *Mucor amphibiorum*, was identified as a major cause of ill health among the Tasmanian platypus population. The fungus causes ulceration in the platypus. It may have been introduced to Tasmania via green tree frogs in banana shipments. Other frog diseases have been identified in mainland frogs, but not in Tasmania. The possible spread of these diseases to Tasmanian frogs could have devastating consequences.

Tree Frogs

Tree frogs can be identified by the presence of circular discs at the end of each toe. These discs provide suction allowing the frogs to climb. The toes of most tree frogs are also about one-third webbed.

To properly identify frogs you may need to handle them. Before touching frogs you must wet your hands so that their skin remains moist.

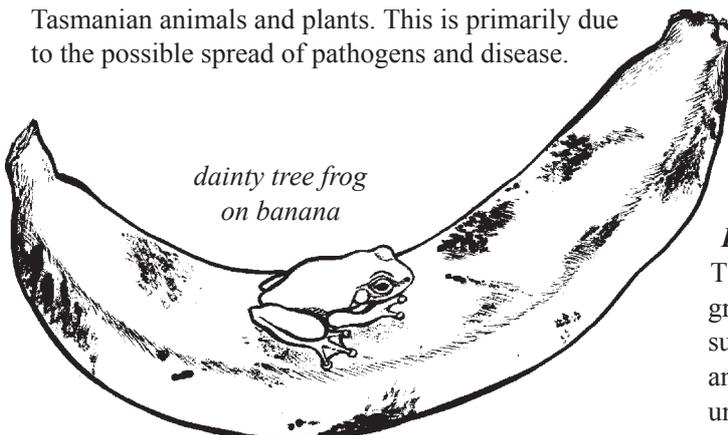
Like chameleons, frogs can change their skin colour so that they blend with the background colour. It takes about an hour for frogs to change colour.

Identifying these frogs

All three introduced tree frogs can be identified by their individual coloring. A description of each of the species is listed below:

Green Tree Frog *Litoria caerulea*

This is the largest of the tree frogs and when fully grown it reaches a body length of 100mm. Their upper surface is dark olive to bright green, and their back and sides often have a scattering of white spots. The undersurface is white to pale yellow.



Their eyes have a golden iris and a horizontal pupil. This species occurs throughout northern Australia, New South Wales and in southern New Guinea.

Dainty Tree or Banana Frog
Litoria gracilentia

This frog grows to a body length of 45mm and its colour varies from bright leaf-green to light green. It is distinguishable from other fully-green species by a yellow line running from the nostril over the eye and tympanum (ear), as well as a purple-brown hind edge on the thigh. Both the belly and throat of this frog are yellow.

Like most other frogs, it is mainly active at night. It usually lives in dense vegetation and reeds associated with water in marshes, lagoons or on the wet grassy banks of streams, as well as among bananas.

Dwarf Tree Frog

Litoria fallax

This slender frog can grow up to 25mm long and can vary from all green to all brown. However, they usually have a green back with brown stripes running down the side of the body. The backs of the legs and the belly are orange or yellow. They commonly occur among reeds in lagoons, swamps and dams as well as on banana plants.

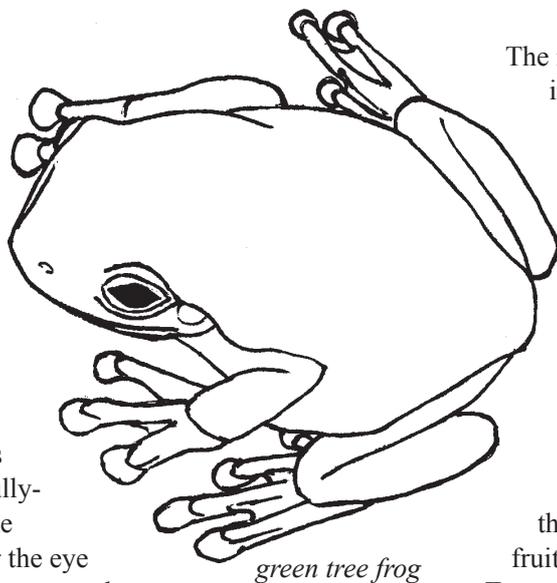
Arrive in warmer months

Bananas are grown and imported all year round. However, more bananas are imported in the spring and summer seasons resulting in a larger number of frogs being found at these times. It is generally the fresh produce workers, dealing with the fruit, who find the weary travellers.

Due to the many banana importers and sellers in Tasmania it is hard to determine exactly how many frogs are arriving.



dwarf tree frog



green tree frog

The number of frogs arriving at an individual supermarket fluctuates from year to year and may be as high as four frogs in a year. The total number of amphibian arrivals in the state is much larger.

There seems to be a link between the route to Tasmania and frog numbers. Bananas that come directly from the growing fields of Queensland seem to contain a larger number of frogs than those which stop in the Victorian fruit markets before being sent on to Tasmania.

Keeping Tasmania clean and green

The most effective and humane solution is to prevent the frogs entering the banana containers in the first place. That is only achievable by altering procedures at the source. Efforts will be made to provide practical solutions to stop the frogs from being kidnapped in the first place. Indications are that the packaging process could be altered to make banana importation less of a risk to Tasmania's "disease free" and "clean green" status.

How you can help

Imported frogs, lizards and snakes are a threat. Not only don't they belong here, but they can not survive in our cooler climate. They can't be sent home because it is not always known where they came from, nor whether they are fit enough for the return journey. Also, they may have picked up a disease during their trip or whilst in Tasmania.

Contact

If you find an imported frog, lizard or snake please contact one of these Agency's immediately:

Nature Conservation Branch

134 Macquarie Street, Hobart. 7000

Phone: (03) 6233 6556

Fax: (03) 6233 3477

Quarantine Branch:

Phone: (03) 6233 3352

Your nearest Parks and Wildlife Service office.

FURTHER INFORMATION

Head Office: 134 Macquarie Street Hobart TAS 7000
Phone: (03) 6233 5732

Internet: www.parks.tas.gov.au
August 2003 © State of Tasmania