

Vanishing cricket frogs get a look

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Researchers in the Chicago area are trying to track the vanishing population of cricket frogs, once so common they were hardly ever studied.

The pint-sized cricket frog used to be all over the Midwest, wherever mud and ponds could be found.

But researchers noticed they were quickly becoming scarce. This year a few were found in spring counts of wildlife in the northern Illinois, sparking a rush to study them, at least to find out why they disappeared if not to begin conservation efforts, the Chicago Tribune reports.

The cricket frogs aren't near extinction and are still heavily found in the U.S. south, but 120 amphibian species have died off worldwide since 1980.

University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign researcher Val Beasley said the cricket frogs are susceptible to environmental changes. Pollution, especially, but any change could alter their living patterns.

Now conservation groups are tracking them and conferences focus on them.

Illinois Natural History Survey herpetologist Christopher Phillips said, "Our ignorance of the life history of this species became really obvious when we started trying to study them."

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