



Cuban Tree Frog

by Carol Ellis

By the mid-1920s, Cuban Tree Frogs had arrived in the Florida Keys via cargo, such as bananas, transported on ships.

Our Canadian friend George was seated on the toilet when suddenly something jumped from inside the bowl and attached firmly to his family jewels. This rugged and stoic hunk of a real man bolted up, freed the frog from his hang me down and ran outside to distance himself from the critter. A Cuban Tree Frog (*Osteopilus septentrionalis*)... AKA Frogzilla (Godzilla has nothing on this guy)... was in the most sacred room of the house and George wanted as much distance between he and it as possible.

Florida was never George's favorite place and this incident did not improve the situation. Tree frogs are associated with trees like Canadians are to hockey rinks. It is totally natural for a tree



During the day the Cuban Tree Frog seeks shelter under shutters and around screen doors. This polite invader tries to use the door knocker to gain access.

frog to climb a tree. They have specially suited suction cupped toes that make them excellent climbers. Once up in the tree the frog jumps onto the roof of a house where they seek out the warmth of the shingles.

Once warmed up, they start searching for a cooler area, and the toilet vent pipe is often the place. Frogs can fall into your bathroom vent pipe and that's how they end up in the toilet. This incident never would have happened if George had simply cut back the trees that hung over his roof and installed a wire mesh screen over the toilet vent pipe. These frogs are known to be nuisance pests that often invade plumbing systems, toilets and sink drains, but can also can cause havoc with utilities and make a general mess wherever they hide.



Cover roof vent pipes with hardware cloth and wire mesh to prevent entry into buildings by Cuban Tree Frogs. Credit: UF/IFAS

During the day they seek out cool places, often under shutters and between patio doors. Each Spring when we lubricate the accordion shutters before hurricane season, we always find stains down the wall behind the panels where the frogs have been hiding. As we close the shutters, the frogs emit mucous that is noxious to humans and pets, and can cause an allergic reaction and trigger asthma.

At night Cuban tree frogs are attracted by lights, which attract bugs and provide a powerful incentive for tree frogs looking for a meal.

There is nothing more tropical than the croak of frogs on a humid summer evening. It starts with a single utterance from a lone frog, then seconds later another chimes in, and before you know it is an out of tune stereophonic chorus resonating from the pond, the hedges, the tree tops, the gutter track and rainwater cistern. Be



quiet and listen, as there is no way you can talk over the noise. What was the Grimm brothers message in their fairy tale The Frog Prince? Was it that beauty is in the eye of the beholder? Some may see a frog, but the princess sees something more beautiful, so she kisses the frog and a curse is broken and the frog becomes her handsome prince. It reminds me of an incident that happened during my sailing days, at English Harbor, Antigua. The Captain's daughter, who was about 5 years old at the time, paused to marvel at a frog sitting on a tree. As she grew closer, the frog jumped onto her face! Yikes. No prince appeared however. Frogs are a bit creepy, and slimy but also beautiful in their creation.

Since the first Cuban Tree frogs were discovered in Key West they have progressively spread north to the Florida mainland most likely by the construction of State Road A1A in the 1940s, on trucks full of plants and produce. They are now are firmly

established as far north as South Carolina. Their ability to thrive in urban areas have made it highly invasive. Cuban Tree Frogs are commonly available in pet stores.

Cuban Tree Frog... CONTINUED - Photos by Carol Ellis except as noted.



The non-native Cuban Tree Frog (*Osteopilus septentrionalis*) is the largest tree frog in N. America and its size ranges from 2 - 5-1/2 inches long. They can change their color and pattern for camouflage.

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Cubans are the largest tree frogs, varying in size from 2 to 5.5 inches in length. They eat insects, but also prey on our native tree frogs, including their tadpoles. The invasive Cuban variety outcompete our native tree frogs such as the American Green Tree Frog (*Hyla cinerea*) which is only 1 to 3 inches long and the Squirrel Tree Frog (*Hyla squirella*) which is smaller, only 1 to 1-1/2 inches long. A Cuban female can lay several hundred to 1000 eggs at a time, and eggs hatch in 30 hours and tadpoles can fully develop in one month.

Features that can help identify Cuban Tree Frogs are their large physical size and larger sticky pads on their toes. They can change color and patterns, and can be white, beige, brown, yellow, green or combinations of these colors. Their skin is rough and warty.

Cuban Tree Frogs are considered invasive, so you can attempt to contain them by making a Tree Frog House. By remov-



The native American Green Tree Frog (*Hyla cinerea*) grows to 1 - 3 inches long. Credit: UF/IFAS



Cuban tree frogs are mostly gray, brown, or green. This young frog, resting on an orchid leaf has a more greenish color than an adult.

ing Cuban Tree Frogs, you can help native tree frogs survive. This UF extension publication explains more: <https://ask.ifas.ufl.edu/publication/UW308>

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This Cuban Tree Frog apparently likes the warmth of the vehicle's hood.



The coloration of the Squirrel Tree Frog ranges from green to tan, gray or brown. Credit: USGS



The native Squirrel Tree Frog (*Hyla squirella*), is only 1 to 1-1/2 inches long and are rapidly disappearing due to predation by the invasive Cuban Tree Frog. Credit: UF/IFAS