

## Looking for food in all the easy places

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This tiny Mexican Smilisca (*Smilisca baudinii*) huddled at the back side of my moth sheet the first week of November. Discovering the frog was significant because it has been a long, drought-stricken summer, without the usual visits from these little tree frogs – nor other frogs and toads that generally hang out around the moth sheet, free-loading for easy food.



Like most other frogs, tree frogs are nocturnal. In wetter summers, they are frequent visitors to the moth sheet along with Gulf Coast toads and Mediterranean geckos. Geckos were a nightly presence this summer, but the absence of the tailless amphibians was noticeable.

Mexican Smilisca or Mexican tree frog (*Smilisca baudinii*)

Also called common Mexican tree frog, the species is listed in Texas as threatened, although there is no federal listing. South of the border, through Central America to mid Costa Rica, the species is very common and classified in the least concern for extinction category.

Although small, the common Mexican tree frog is the largest tree frog native to the United States; its most northern native range is the Lower Rio Grande Valley where small, isolated populations have been found in Cameron and Hidalgo counties.

Common Mexican tree frogs are chunky, with rather short legs, and stretched out, measured snout to vent, are about three inches long. Huddled on the back frame of the moth sheet, it could have fit on a quarter coin. For perspective, consider the green *Complex Ponana citrina* hopper at the frog's right "elbow" in the second photo is a mere 0.31 inches long.

Common Mexican tree frogs vary in color and markings from tan to brown, gray or green; some may have the classic pattern of darker colored, irregular patches on the back. They can change color depending on the circumstances. Regardless color or pattern, the legs will show a distinctive banding. Color change provides camouflage and may help regulate body moisture and temperature. They move by leaping, using forelimbs and hind limbs.



Mexican tree frog with hopper

Insectivores with exceptional eyesight for nocturnal hunting, these tree frogs eat crickets, flies, mosquitoes, ants, worms, spiders, beetles, moths and other small invertebrates, ambushing prey with their long, sticky tongues.