



The pig says oink. The cat says meow. The cell phone says ribbit.

By [Alex Breitler](#)

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The California red-legged frog might have vanished from San Joaquin County, but its quiet croak can live on every time your cell phone rings.

An environmental group is offering ring tones featuring the calls of rare and endangered species, hoping to improve conservation efforts around the world.

More than 10,000 people have downloaded the free tones since last month, said Jeff Miller of the Center for Biological Diversity in Oakland.

"It's one thing to read about endangered species," he said Friday. "If you hear the call, it personalizes the species and really gets people interested."

Pick from among a dozen frogs and toads, two dozen owls, tropical birds or the most popular call of all: the haunting moan of a killer whale.

Over the years, the calls have been collected from around the world, sometimes at great difficulty. One researcher ventured into east Asia in the winter to track the elusive Blakiston's fish owl, a massive bird as tall as a St. Bernard, with an equally impressive voice. Only a few hundred exist.

New owl species are discovered every year, said David H. Johnson, director of the Virginia-based Global Owl Project. Many hoots have never been recorded.

"We tried to pick species that were different and would sound good on a cell phone," said Johnson, whose group helped pick the new ring tones.

The red-legged frog is a rarity thanks in part to humans who feasted on frog legs at San Francisco restaurants in the 1800s. More recently, development has destroyed many of the wetlands where the frogs once lived.

One population has been documented on a ranch in Calaveras County. Robert Stack, head of the Jumping Frog Research Institute in Angels Camp, is one of few who would recognize the male red-legged frog's distinctive mating call.

"They're basically saying, 'Hey, over here, check me out,'" Stack said.

But even at the ranch, that call often is drowned out by the Pacific tree frog, a smaller but much louder cousin.

"You've really got to listen," Stack said.

The ring tones, he said, are a great way to preserve the red-legged frog's soft song.

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Call of the wild

To listen to the free ring tones and have one sent to your cell phone, visit www.rareearthtones.org.