

Toads

Toads are squat, tailless amphibians that belong to the order Anura. They are often confused with frogs. Toads, however, have dry, rough skin and short legs, whereas frogs have moist, smooth skin and longer legs. Toads belong to the family Bufonidae, which is separated into about 30 genera. Of these, the true toads (genus *Bufo*) are the most abundant, with more than 300 species.



Figure 1: American toad (*Bufo americanus*).

Toads are found worldwide. The true toads, such as the American toad (*B. americanus*) and the European toad (*B. bufo*), inhabit all areas except Australia, Madagascar, Polynesia, and the polar regions, although *B. marinus* has been introduced into Australia and some South Pacific islands. True toads have stout bodies with short legs, which gives them their characteristic walking or hopping gait. Their size ranges from about 1 to 10 inches (2 to 25 centimeters). The thick, dry, often warty back skin is generally mottled brown.

True toads have several poison-secreting glands, which are located on their back, in their warts, and in two prominent raised areas behind their eyes. The poison is secreted when the toad is molested. It irritates the eyes and mucous membranes of many of its predators. The poisons of the Colorado River toad (*B. alvarius*) and the giant toad (*B. marinus*, also called the cane toad) affect animals as large as dogs and may cause temporary paralysis or even death. The Chinese have long used dried toad poison to treat various ailments. Contrary to popular belief, toads do not cause warts.



Figure 2: Some toads, such as the Oriental fire-bellied toad, can be quite colorful.

Although they are amphibians, true toads spend most of their time on land. They are also nocturnal. They frequently remain in fairly small areas, feeding on whatever insects or small animals they can catch with their sticky tongues. Most true toads remain in their burrows in winter and during times of drought. They breed in water and may migrate 1 mile (1.5 kilometers) or more to a suitable breeding pond. The eggs—from about 600 to more than 30,000, depending on the species of toad—are laid in two long jelly tubes. The tadpoles hatch in a few days and transform into adults in one to three months.

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