

Toads

Toad, any squat, rough-skinned, tailless amphibian of the order Anura, and especially a member of the family Bufonidae. The true toads (*Bufo*), with more than 300 species, are found worldwide except in Australia, Madagascar, polar regions, and Polynesia, though *Bufo marinus* has been introduced into Australia and some South Pacific islands. Besides *Bufo*, the family includes 30 genera, one of which (*Nectophrynoides*) contains one of the few anuran genera to bear live young.



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

Harlequin frogs, which are also known as variegated toads (*Atelopus*), are found in South and Central America. They are commonly triangular-headed and have enlarged hind feet. Some are brightly coloured in black with yellow, red, or green. When molested, the small poisonous *Melanophryniscus stelzneri* of Uruguay bends its head and limbs over its body to display its bright orange hands and feet. This position may be a method of warning the intruder of the toxicity of the toad.



Figure 2: Panamanian golden toad (*Atelopus zeteki*).

True toads, of which the American toad (*Bufo americanus*) and the European toad (*B. bufo*) are representative, are stout-bodied with short legs that limit them to the characteristic walking or hopping gait. Their size ranges from about 2 to 25 cm (1 to 10 inches). The thick, dry, often warty skin on the back is generally mottled brown. Poison-secreting glands are located on the back and in the warts but are most concentrated in two prominent raised areas behind the eyes, the parotid glands.

The poison, which is secreted when the toad is molested, irritates the eyes and mucous membranes of many, though not all, 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, in some instances causing 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 3: Cane toad (*Bufo marinus*).

True toads are mainly terrestrial and nocturnal. They frequently remain in fairly small areas, feeding on whatever insects or small animals they can catch with their sticky tongues. Most remain in their burrows in winter and during drought. They breed in water and may migrate 1.5 km (1 mile) or more to a suitable breeding pond. The eggs (600 to over 30,000, depending on species) 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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