



Southern Toad

Bufo terrestris

How can anyone not think toads are cute? Their squatty little bodies combined with big eyes and a gentle disposition make them enchanting members of the amphibian world. But the importance of toads in local ecosystems extends far beyond their “cute appeal.” Toads are important for their role in natural pest control, eating countless insects and other invertebrates. And just in case you’re worried, although most toads are covered with wart-like projections, no one has ever developed a wart from handling toads.

From spring through fall, the calls of male southern toads may be heard at breeding sites throughout the southeastern U.S. Wetland breeding sites may include everything from roadside ditches to permanent farm ponds. A male toad calls by using the vocal sac on its chin. The male’s musical trill is a signal to females in the neighborhood — “I am here...I am here.” The call of a large male toad sounds different from that of a small male, so a female ‘knows’ something about the caller even from a distance. Once a female locates and chooses a male, the two toads mate and the eggs are fertilized as they are being deposited in shallow water. The long strings of eggs, often numbering in the thousands, hatch into minuscule black tadpoles. Next, the race is on for the tadpoles to develop into “toadlets” before their wetland dries. The tiny tadpoles feed on algae and other plant material in the water. If the toad tadpoles are not eaten by fish, invertebrates, or other predators, then they will grow and finally metamorphose (change) into fingernail-sized replicas of adults. At this point in their life cycle, the toadlets have lost their gills and are ready to begin life on land. It may take the young toads 2-3 years to reach adult size.



Some toads have been known to live 10 years or more in the wild. Adult toads will often return to the same wetlands they were born in to lay eggs. Like other amphibians, toads cannot survive without proper aquatic and terrestrial habitats. The same wetlands that are breeding sites for amphibians are ones we continue to pollute and sometimes destroy. Continued research on amphibian populations, combined with environmental education focused on wetland habitats, is critical for the future of all frogs, toads, and salamanders.

*This information is provided by Savannah River Ecology Laboratory Outreach and SPARC.
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