

Species profile:

Woodhouse's Toad

Anaxyrus woodhousii

Information provided by Cross Timbers Connection



What do they look like?

You see it hunkered down in your garden, or maybe hopping across the back roads in the darkness. This is one of our bigger toads, with a body length from about 2 to 5 inches. It has light brown or olive skin marked with irregular dark blotches or spots. Within those spots are small warts, little skin glands that produce an irritating substance to convince a dog or coyote to let it go, making it too yucky to eat. There is usually a thin light stripe down the back. Between the eyes are “L”-shaped ridges called cranial crests. Behind each eye is a long oval lump called a parotoid gland that secretes more of that sticky, toxic stuff to defend the toad if something attacks it.

Similar species

The Texas toad is plainly marked, without a white stripe down the back and little to no cranial crests. The Gulf Coast toad has deep, usually dark-colored cranial crests, a light stripe down the back, and a broad, dark band down each side (bordered with an irregular white stripe). Their parotoid glands are somewhat triangular or teardrop shaped.

How do they defend themselves? Can they hurt you?

A Woodhouse's toad will hop away from danger, with a series of quick hops that can make it harder to catch than you think. And then there are the parotoid glands and warts that produce milky toxin that evidently is bitter (don't try tasting it!) and irritating to the eyes and mucus membranes (wash your hands!). The toxin is not considered a problem for us medically, and the toad **cannot** give you warts.

Where are they found?

Woodhouse's toad is found from parts of Oregon and California to the Great Plains and down through parts of Texas, New Mexico, Arizona, and parts of Mexico. In Texas it has been found in the Panhandle to north central Texas and down to the

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coast, as well as within the Trans-Pecos. It is not found from Terrell County to Corpus Christi. Herpetologists disagree about whether similar toads in East Texas are Woodhouse's, a separate species, or a hybrid. Woodhouse's toad has been found in several counties in the southern tip of Texas. In some places in north, central and south Texas it is no longer found or is very uncommon.

This toad can live in a variety of habitats including grasslands, woods, old fields, floodplains, ponds and ditches, and streams even in arid country as long as there is adequate moisture. They ordinarily stay under rocks, logs or other cover during the day and are active at night.



What do they eat?

They eat a wide variety of insects, including beetles and crickets.

How do they reproduce? What does their call sound like?

Breeding occurs from February to September. Males congregate around shallow water and call to attract females. The call is a bleating "waaaa," dropping off at the end. Females lay thousands of eggs in standing water, pools, ditches and ponds, and they hatch into tadpoles that live in the water. The tadpoles develop into tiny toads that live on land, eating tiny invertebrates and growing into adult toads.

What conservation problems do they face?

The International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Red List shows it as a species of "Least Concern," meaning that in most places it seems to be doing pretty well. However, in parts of Texas it has disappeared from places where it used to be seen. Overall, amphibians in many places are in trouble because of issues like loss of habitat, climate change, and the red imported fire ant. For many kinds of amphibians, a fungal infection has been an especially destructive threat.

Toad, or frog?

What's the difference? Toads generally are more squat, more often with dry, warty skin and shorter back legs for hopping. Frogs are more often streamlined with long back legs and webbed feet for leaping and swimming. However, there are exceptions. The narrow-mouthed "toads" have smooth skin, and some frog species have fairly bumpy skin. Frogs and toads are both members of the amphibian order Anura.

Sources of information:

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