

Marine Toad

Bufo marinus

Order: Anura (also Salienta)

Family: Bufonidae

Description: Known as the **cane** or **giant toad**, marine toads have flat heads and bodies. Grow to 4-6 inches, up to a length of 9 inches – female is usually larger than male. **Dry skin** that is brown in color with lighter spots, and a cream underbelly. Very large eyes and large, triangular *paratoid glands*. Known to live up to 40 years in captivity. Nocturnal.

Special Features:

- **Warts** – Collections of poison glands. When the toad is attacked, warts exude milky fluid, which acts as an irritant to the mucus membranes of an attacker (snakes and birds don't appear to be affected).
- **Parotoid Glands** – 2 concentrations of poisonous glands behind each eye and extending along the body. When stressed, marine toads can release enough toxin (a milky white fluid) to kill a large dog.
- **Tympanic Membranes** – On either side of the head, just behind the eye. In addition to their use in hearing, these membranes have been correlated with the ability of the toad to produce sound.
- The *Peterson Field Guide (Reptiles and Amphibians, 1991)* describes the call of the marine toad as a slow, low-pitched trill, like the exhaust noise of a distant tractor.
- **Mating Call** is produced by pumping air back and forth over vocal chords.

- Similar Species:** Large size and distinctive appearance distinguishes this toad from others.
- Range and Habitat:** Native to northern South America through Central America and eastern Mexico, also extreme southern Texas. Introduced to Haiti, Hawaii, the Phillipines, Puerto Rico, and Australia for pest control. However, occurrence in southern Florida is the result of accidental releases at Miami International Airport, and further sales as pets. Prefers open, damp, leaf-littered where insect food is plentiful. Usually flourishes in arid to tropical rainforest habitats.
- Wild Diet:** Large appetites and voracious feeders, they will eat just about anything they can catch and fit in their mouths. Use persistence, energy and speed to catch prey. They often feed on worms and insects.
- Reproduction:** In early spring, toads move to a breeding pond where males attract females with their calls. Males call while pushing themselves up on their front legs in shallow water. The male clasps the female behind the arms and the pair swims together (referred to as "amplexus") until the female comes into contact with some water weed. The female extrudes eggs as a long string while the male ejects sperm over them. This continues for several hours. The female then swims around so the long string of eggs (which is usually 7-10 ft. long) gets wrapped around the water weed. The female can lay up to 35,000 eggs. The tadpoles hatch after 12 days. Time to maturity varies with temperature, usually taking about 3 months.
- Predators:** Dogs, snakes, larger frogs and toads, and birds. Dragonfly nymphs and other water

insects feed on toad larvae. A small percentage of babies actually reach maturity due to predation.

Notes:

- **Class Amphibia** (from the Greek for “both lives”) – Along with frogs and salamanders, toads are classified as amphibians.
- **Frogs vs. Toads** – Frogs usually have moist, smooth skin and are good leapers. Toads have dry, warty skin and usually hop.
- **Invasive Species?** – Introduced to certain areas, marine toads are beginning to out-compete native species.
- **Movie Stars** – A documentary about the marine toad’s introduction and success in Australia is called *Cane Toads: An Unnatural History*. Be sure to rent it...
- **“Toad Licking”** – The secretions of this toad can be made into a hallucinogenic drug. Improper preparation of this drug, including “toad licking,” has resulted in deaths.
- **NOTE** – A person does not get warts from touching toads, but their skin-gland secretions can be irritating to mucus membranes. After handling, remember to keep your fingers away from your eyes and mouth until you wash your hands.