

AMERICAN TOAD *Bufo americanus*

11 cm / 4"

Probably our most familiar amphibian, American Toads can be found near homes or in gardens and may occur in surprisingly large numbers in a favourable habitat.

APPEARANCE: The dorsal colour is usually brown with black, reddish, or darker brown markings. The dark dorsal blotches usually contain one or two warts (upper photo). There may be a narrow white stripe down the middle of the back. More colourful individuals occur towards the northern part of the range. The venter is white with dark spots or mottling. Tadpoles are small and black; they usually congregate in shallow water, often in large numbers (middle photo).

► Fowler's Toads are found in Ontario only on the northern shores of Lake Erie; their dark dorsal blotches contain three or more warts (see Comparative Photographs, pp. 26–27).

HABITAT AND BEHAVIOUR: The thick skin of American Toads reduces water loss and allows them to inhabit locations drier than those available to many other amphibian species. They can often be found near human habitation, and individuals may remain in a garden or other favourable location all summer. They feed on insects, slugs, and worms. Toads overwinter by burrowing into the soil and may dig down to depths of more than a metre.

REPRODUCTION: American Toads congregate in the spring to breed. The males emit a prolonged trilling call (lower photo), and a loud chorus can be produced by males calling from a breeding pond. The females gravitate toward the sound. Toads are "explosive breeders," meaning that they arrive at the pond more or less simultaneously and within a few days they all mate, deposit their eggs, and depart. Eggs are laid in long strands on the bottom of the pond or among vegetation. Newly hatched tadpoles are very small, but they grow quickly and transform after about two months. Because most eggs are laid within a short period of time, transformation occurs more or less simultaneously. Many tiny toads leave the pond together and disperse into the surrounding area.

STATUS: COSEWIC: Not at risk. OMNR: Not at risk.



