

Nature Notes

Western Toad



As an amphibian, the western toad (*Bufo boreas boreas*) lives part of its life in water and part of its life on land. Breeding requires open water but after the breeding season, western toads spend up to 90% of their time in terrestrial habitats, searching out shade to prevent drying out. Western toads return to the same breeding grounds each spring. In the Kimberley Nature Park, listen for the breeding calls near Dipper Lake or the gully wetland.

After breeding the female adult lays long, double strands of up to



Tadpoles

Photo by Larry Halverson

15,000 eggs that hatch in 3-12 days. The tadpoles enter a risky world where up to 99% do not survive to adulthood. They must run the gauntlet of predators including birds, snakes and invertebrates. Those that do survive metamorphose into 1 cm toadlets 6-8 weeks after hatching, similar in appearance to small adults.

Adult toads vary in colour from olive-green to dark brown

with a pale, mottled belly, dark skin gland blotches and a white stripe down the back. Prominent swellings behind their gold-flecked eyes, called parotoid glands, produce a mild poison that makes toads unpalatable to a number of predators.

The adult toads feed on algae and floating organic matter as well worms, spiders, bees, any insect and carrion. In turn, they are food for a variety of birds, mammals and snakes.

Toads absorb water and oxygen directly through their skin, making them sensitive to pollution. Water-borne pollutants, habitat loss, increased UV rays and diseases carried by introduced species have all been identified as causes for the rapid decline in toad and frog populations in the last decade.

Protecting and appreciating the ponds and wetlands in the KNP can help conserve the local western toad population.



Adult

Photo by Walter Siegmund

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