

Fowler's Toad

Anaxyrus fowleri



photo-Tom Diez

General characteristics

One of only two true toads in Pennsylvania, the Fowler's Toad is abundant throughout most of its range. It does most of its foraging at night, preferring to rest during the day when it burrows into the ground or hides among clumps of grasses. It is more slender and more agile than our other toad, the Eastern American Toad, but it cannot tolerate temperatures as low as the Eastern American Toad can withstand. As an adult, the Fowler's Toad averages 2 to 3 inches in length, nearly identical to the Eastern American Toad.

Identification

The skin of Fowler's Toad is dry, a common trait among toads. Its general coloration is brown or gray with an occasional greenish specimen showing up in the population. A light, nearly white stripe runs down the middle of the back. Large dark spots or blotches, more or less arranged in pairs, cover the back. Each of the largest spots contains at least three warts. On the underside of this toad, the belly is white and unmarked, although a dark spot sometimes is found on the chest. Warts cover the thighs, but they are small compared to those found on the Eastern American Toad.

The parotoid, or shoulder, glands are elongated (compared to kidney shaped ones on the Eastern American Toad). They come in contact with the cranial crests just behind each eye. The throat of the male is black; the female's throat is a very light shade. The underside of each hind foot of the Fowler's Toad bears two tubercles. These tubercles should not be confused with the single, stiff spade protruding from each hind foot of the American Spadefoot Toad. The eyes of the Fowler's Toad have horizontally oval pupils with bright yellow irises.

Range

Except for populations in the Lake Erie Watershed in the northwest, the Fowler's Toad in Pennsylvania is restricted to



the southern two-thirds of Pennsylvania. From there it extends along the Atlantic Coastal Plain to North Carolina and westward to Missouri.

Habitat

The Fowler's Toad likes low-lying areas, especially where it can find sandy soils along the water. But marshes and even slight depressions temporarily filled with rainwater are accepted by the Fowler's Toad as suitable—though perhaps not permanent-habitat. It frequently forages among landscaped flower or vegetable gardens usually at night. It spends most of the day burrowed beneath the ground.

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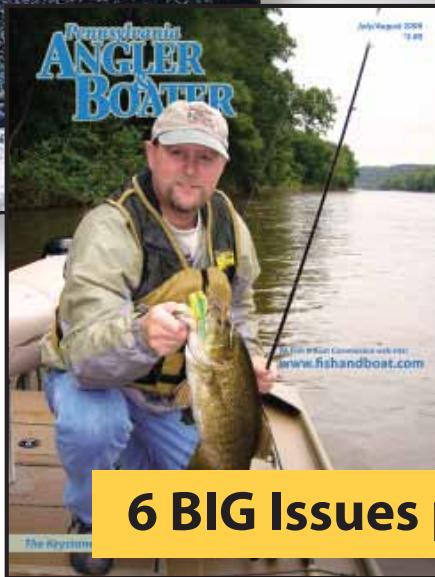
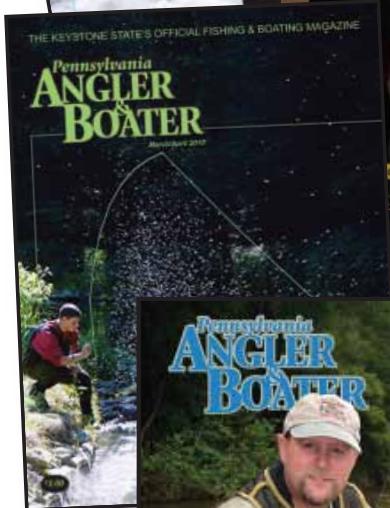
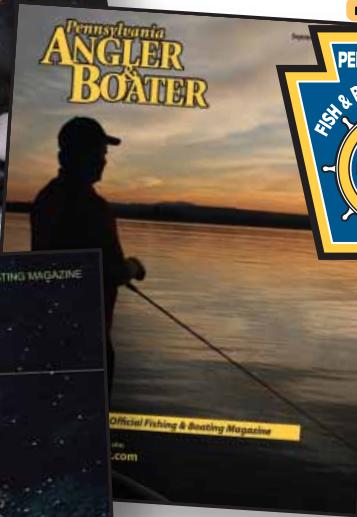
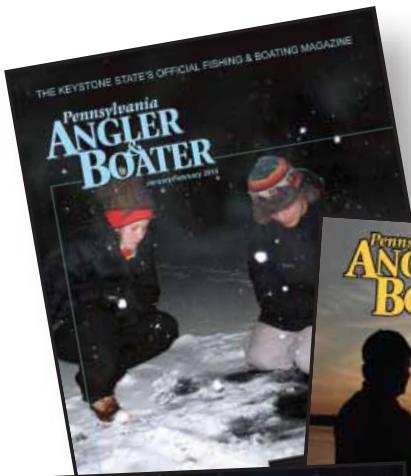
Male and female Fowler's Toads meet sometime from late March to mid-August. The Fowler's Toad waits for temperatures to warm up a bit, coming out of hibernation later than the Eastern American Toad. The peak breeding activity probably occurs in May and takes place in shallow standing or slightly moving water. The eggs, which number many thousands, are laid in long, tangled strings. They become attached to vegetation growing in the shallows. This vegetation eventually provides shelter for the tadpoles. Incubation takes only about a week, perhaps a few days longer depending on the water temperature. The tadpoles are black and transform into young toads by mid-summer.

Call

The male Fowler's Toad begins calling in late March as he prepares to find a mate. Calling usually is done from shallow water, though sometimes he'll leave the water to sing from the shoreline. The call has been described as sounding like a weakened bleat of sheep. Lasting from one to four seconds, it has good carrying power and can be heard over a wide area. The throat sac is round when inflated; it is light-colored and transparent.

Food

A nocturnal critter, the Fowler's Toad usually has no problem finding an ample supply of insects, a favorite food source. It takes advantage of lighted areas, knowing, it seems, that lights attract insects, thus making foraging for a meal a simpler task. ☐



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