

PLAY

PENNSYLVANIA FISH & BOAT COMMISSION

SUMMER 1999

Pennsylvania • League • of • Angling • Youth

Beautiful Bufo

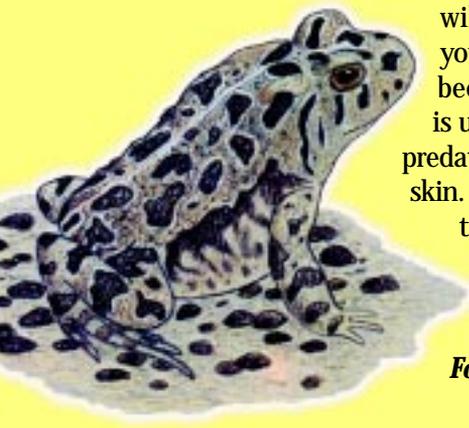
“Don’t touch it—they give you warts!”

Many people have heard these words through the years. When spoken, most of us know exactly what “it” is. The “it” they are referring to is a toad. Toads have had a bad rap for hundreds of years. They were feared by many people for bringing bad luck. The magic of wizards and spells of witches often included toads! Even today, some people believe when toads and frogs begin calling, a storm may be approaching. Whatever you believe, just remember that toads are very good to have around. They are an important part of the food chain.

In Pennsylvania, there are three kinds of toads. The Eastern American toad, Fowler’s toad, and the Eastern spadefoot toad. All three are different from frogs because they have dry, warty skin. Toads also have shorter legs and a pair of parotoid (par-o-toid), or poison, glands on the head. The most common toad species in Pennsylvania is the American toad, *Bufo americanus*.

The American toad looks a lot like Fowler’s toad. Sometimes it is hard to tell them apart. Both species have poison sacs on the back of the head and down the back. These sacs look like big “warts,” but they

will not give you warts if you touch them! However, because the poison inside is used for defense against predators, it may irritate your skin. It may even cause death to smaller animals trying to eat a toad for lunch!



Fowler's toad



Eastern American toad

Illustration-Tom Duran Jr.

So don’t be afraid of toads. If you pick one up, though, handle it gently.

The American toad’s nickname is “hoptoad.” It hops from place to place looking for food. It eats many different kinds of insects, slugs, worms, and other small invertebrates. Because it eats many common insect pests, it’s a friendly sight to gardeners and farmers throughout the late spring, summer, and early fall.

Like most amphibians, the American toad returns to water to mate and lay eggs each spring. The males arrive first

and begin calling their long “trill.” American toads may begin calling as early as March. The eggs are laid in long, curly strings covered with protective jelly in a marsh, shallow pond, or even roadside ditch. There may be as many as 20,000 eggs laid at a time. The new tadpoles stay as tadpoles until mid-summer. There they begin to change into adults. As winter approaches, toads begin looking for places in which to hibernate. The warm spring sun and longer days bring the toads out of hibernation. Then the whole cycle begins again.

Although they may look ugly and have had a “bad rap,” toads are one of the most beneficial critters hopping around Pennsylvania!

Eastern spadefoot toad

