

Nature Notes



CANE TOADS

Australia does not have any native toads. One hundred and one Cane Toads *Bufo marinus* were brought to Queensland from Hawaii in 1935 to control cane beetles, a pest of sugar cane. The toads did not control the beetle. Instead they spread overland.

People in Queensland and northern NSW have been living with these creatures for years. In 2001 they reached Kakadu National Park. Now those of us in the Top End have to live with them too.

WHY ARE THERE SO MANY?

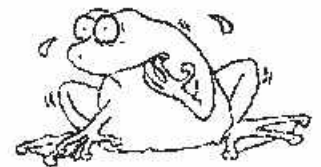


Female Cane Toads can lay 4 000 to 36 000 eggs. Adults, eggs, tadpoles and toadlets are all poisonous. They lay the eggs in long spaghetti-like strands of clear jelly which can be over 10 metres long.

Toad tadpoles are black and much smaller than most tadpoles of native frogs. They have pointed arrow-like snouts, thick tails and are black underneath. If you are unsure, check with the Parks and Wildlife Service.

WHY ARE THEY SO BAD?

There are three ways that a Cane Toad can harm our native wildlife: **eating** them; **competing** with them for food and shelter sites, and **poisoning** the animals that eat them.



Adult Cane Toads will eat almost anything that fits in their mouth. They love ants, termites, millipedes and beetles and can eat up to 200 food items in one night. In urban areas they love eating pet food, but they won't poison it. The animals most threatened by Cane Toads are frog eaters such as snakes, goannas and Northern Quolls.

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WHERE DO THEY COME FROM?

Find these toad terms in the grid. The letters left over will spell out where the natural home of the Cane Toad is.

- | | | |
|--------------|--------------|-------------|
| BONY RIDGE | OBVIOUS EAR | TADPOLE |
| BUFO MARINUS | POISON GLAND | TOXIC EGGS |
| CANE TOAD | PREDATION | WARTY SKIN |
| COMPETITION | QUEENSLAND | WEBBED FEET |



MISTAKEN IDENTITY

It is easy to mistake a Cane Toad for some of our native frogs. Most of the frogs that look similar to Cane Toads are smaller. Cane Toad colouring ranges from grey to olive brown with a belly that is pale with dark, irregular spots. Cane Toads can also be identified by their obvious ears, raised (parotid) poison glands on the shoulders, a high bony ridge over the eyes, circular pupils and partially webbed feet. If it is smaller than 55 mm and has no bony ridge, it could be an Ornate Burrowing Frog, a Marbled Frog or a Northern Spade Foot Frog.

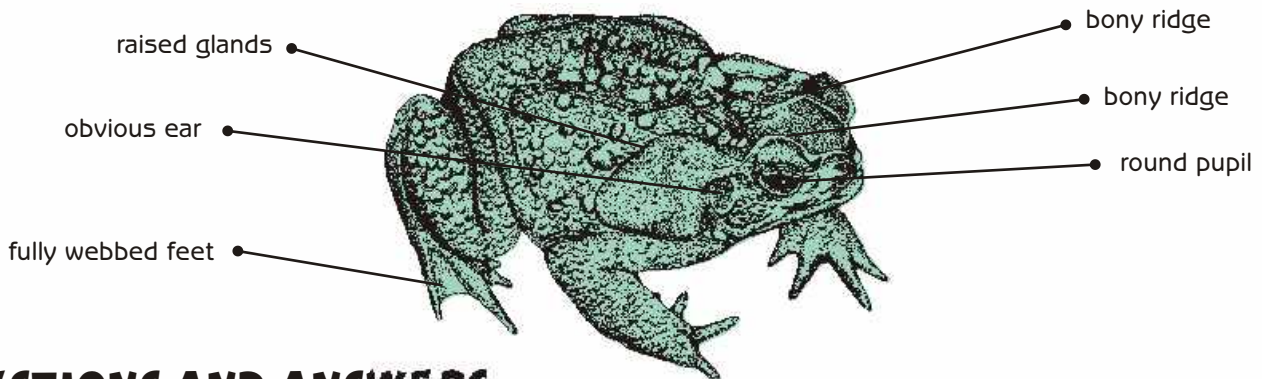
KNOW YOUR NATIVES!

Giant Frog, *Cyclorana australis*
- up to 100 mm, obvious ear, horizontal pupils and feet not webbed.



Marbled Frog, *Limnodynastes convexiusculus* - up to 55 mm, ear not obvious, horizontal pupils and feet partially webbed.

TELLTALE FEATURES OF A CANE TOAD



QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Can I keep them out of my backyard?

Installing a 500 mm high barrier of fine mesh or smooth sheeting around your perimeter (including the gate) could help to keep them out. Cane Toads can burrow a bit, so you will need to sink the barrier about 150 mm into the ground. You will also need to watch out for toads that enter through your gate.

What else can I do?

Avoid leaving containers of water around for toad's to breed in. Keep your pet's food out of reach. If you have a pond, remove any Cane Toad eggs you see. Be careful you don't accidentally help Cane Toads travel - they are great hitchhikers and will find their way into pot plants, trailers and swags.

Are my pets safe?

Cats are usually too cautious to attack Cane Toads, but dogs may try to eat them. If the dog is taken to a vet straight away, it will probably survive.

What effect will they have?

Many native animals will die and some species may become much rarer, possibly even extinct in their regions. We will see Cane Toads (dead and alive) on roads, in parks and gardens and in bodies of water like drains and swimming pools. Once their presence has peaked after a couple of years, we won't see quite so many of them.

What should I do if I see one?

Make sure you have a Cane Toad first. You can reduce Cane Toad numbers on your property by killing any that you see. The most humane way is to use a plastic shopping bag to pick the toad up, double bag it, tie it tightly and freeze overnight. You can bury it or put it in your wheelie bin.

Where can I find out more about Cane Toads?

These websites are useful:

www.frogwatch.org.au, www.nt.gov.au/parks,
www.csiro.au

