

BOGDIVERSITY THURSDAY



—*from Head Naturalist Clinton*

American Toad

POST #36—July 7, 2022

We are approaching 100 species covered during our Bogdiversity Thursday posts! We have covered nearly every major species group on our Master Species List by this time and are excited to continue to share the biodiversity of our region with you! This week we feature a species that is very widespread, quite common, and recently has been on our minds at the Welcome Center: American Toad!

American Toads are found throughout the state of Minnesota and are not found much further west than the western edge of Minnesota in North America. This charismatic amphibian is a treat to see, whether you find one in your garden, under a log, or in a small pond. American Toad is one of three species of regularly occurring species of toad in Minnesota and the only toad in our region. Lately, toads have been on our minds, as we have had to remove a staggering number of toads from the Welcome Center addition construction site (up to 75 toads at a time!).

The loud, vigorous trills of American Toads can be heard from small ponds to lakes across their range during May and June. Though American Toads are mostly terrestrial and spend a lot of time burrowing in the soil, they still need to return to water to breed like most amphibian species. Female toads can lay as many as 20,000 eggs in long strands. American Toad tadpoles are quite small and metamorphose at a length of only 1/2 inch! Right now, dark clouds of tadpoles can be found in small ponds around the region and soon there will be thousands of tiny toadlets covering the landscape.

Because toads are fairly slow moving and primarily terrestrial, they have developed a number of strategies to defend themselves from predators. Their cryptic coloration and rough texture helps them blend into the leaf litter and soil when at rest. If agitated they will employ one of three strategies: puff up, urinate, or expose their parotid glands. Usually toads puff in response to predation by snakes, as this makes them more difficult to swallow. When humans pick up toads, they usually choose to urinate! Only in the most extreme cases will toads exude the toxins contained in their parotid glands and large glands along their femurs. This toxin will not harm humans, but will cause other predators to second guess their prey choice!

If you observe toads regularly, you are sure to notice the wide variation in coloration. American toads are typically a shade of brown, but individuals can range from reddish, to black, to yellowish! Their color can change due to environmental factors or

stressors and a wide range of coloration and pattern are included in the photos below.

(Photos by Head Naturalist Clinton and Sparky Stensaas)



Dark colored toads show up from time to time. This is still an American Toad, just a really dark one!



A browner than normal American Toad! This color form is much more common than the darkest color form above, but still pretty different than the typical American Toad.



A fairly red American Toad. Specimens that are a uniform brick red can sometimes be found, especially in areas with reddish stone and clay soils.



A normal looking American Toad! The black striping and maculation seen on this toad are fairly normal, but some specimens might show strong striping along their bellies.