



Signs of the Seasons: A New England Phenology Program

Indicator Species Fact Sheet

Eastern American Toad, *Anaxyrus americanus*

The American toad is commonly found throughout New England and is native to eastern North America. Considered habitat generalists, these toads can be found anywhere that moisture and ample food are available, including multiple forest types, fields and urban areas. Toads play an important ecosystem role as insect consumers, thereby keeping populations in check.

Appearance: Toads are shades of brown in color and are covered with warts. They have a wide head and short front limbs. Behind the eyes, there are kidney bean shaped glands; these paratoid glands produce toxins that give the toad an unpleasant taste. The toads range in length from 2-4 ½ inches. Females are slightly larger than males and lack the characteristic dark colored throat seen on males.



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Feeding: American toads are known to feed from early morning into the evening. They consume what is available and may eat a variety of larval insects, slugs, spiders, and centipedes, for example. Tadpoles feed on algae within their pools.

Life History: Breeding season is triggered by the arrival of warmer temperatures and longer days. It begins in March or April when the toads arrive at shallow, fresh water pools. Males grasp the females around the belly in order to fertilize the eggs as they are laid. Between 4,000-12,000 eggs are laid in long parallel strands. They will hatch in 3-12 days, requiring 5-10 weeks to complete metamorphosis and 2-4 years to reach sexual maturity. American toads will spend the winter months hibernating within soil or soft leaf litter.

Note: The scientific name was changed from *Bufo americanus* to *Anaxyrus americanus* when researchers were able to demonstrate that some species grouped together in the genus *Bufo* were sufficiently different to be placed in separate genera.

Sources and Additional Information:

Grossman, S. 2002. "Anaxyrus americanus" (On-line), Animal Diversity Web. Accessed July 01, 2014 at http://animaldiversity.ummz.umich.edu/accounts/Anaxyrus_americanus/

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