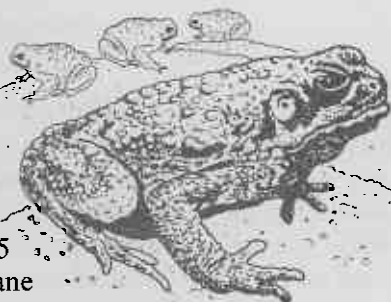


## FAUNA

# Cane Toad - a potential threat in WA.

By Marion Massam

**T**HE cane toad (*Bufo marinus*) is native to South and Central America, but has taken up residency in eastern Australia following its introduction to Queensland in 1935 to control sugar cane beetles. The toads multiplied and spread rapidly, preferring to eat many beneficial insects like bees instead of the cane beetles.



Like other amphibians, cane toads deter predators by producing a toxic substance from glands located behind the head. The liquid contains a compound called bufotenine, which is similar to the neurotransmitter serotonin, and also occurs in certain toadstools and plants. Animals which consume toads soon die as a result of the poison.

Cane toads currently occur over 50 per cent of Queensland and much of northern New South Wales and are spreading rapidly in the Northern Territory, towards Katherine. It is predicted they could eventually spread over most of the coastal areas of Australia. They pose a major threat to the Kimberley wetlands.

Toads eat whatever is available and consume any animal they can swallow. They are often found eating dog and cat food. It is thought that the toads out compete native amphibians possibly by competing for food, poisoning or consuming their rivals.

Cane toads are declared pests in Western Australia. They cannot be imported or kept in the State. Toads have been found in WA during inspections of imported fresh fruit, vegetables and nursery plants

originating in the eastern states. If you see an unusual toad or frog, take note of its main features (see below) and contact Agriculture Western Australia on 08 9368 3333.

### Profile of the Cane Toad

- ◆ Up to 23 cm in length and 1 kg in weight. Heavily built with short legs, no webs between toes and rough warty skin. Large poison glands are found behind the head.
- ◆ Found in warm temperate to semi-arid climates, abundant in the wet and seasonally dry tropics. Can survive dry conditions.
- ◆ Female toads can produce 8 000 to 50 000 eggs in a clutch. They can breed at least twice a year and normally lay their eggs in slow moving freshwater streams and dams.
- ◆ Domestic pets and native animals can die after eating or biting toads. Native species of reptiles (e.g. goannas) and mammals (e.g. chuditch) are also at risk. The eggs and tadpoles of toads are also poisonous. Toads represent an economic threat to apiarists as they consume bees.
- ◆ Biological control is probably the only practical means of limiting the spread or reducing the number of toads/ Research is currently being undertaken by the CSIRO.

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