

Why are Houston Toads endangered?

Habitat loss and alteration, especially the disappearance or alteration of breeding ponds, are the most serious threats facing the toad. Extensive clearing of native vegetation near breeding ponds reduces the quality of breeding, feeding, and resting habitat, and increases the chances of predation. Conversion of native vegetation to sod-forming, introduced grasses poses problems for toads because the grass is generally too dense for the toad to move freely and thick sod inhibits burrowing. High traffic roads also take their toll on toads.

Poor livestock grazing management and fire suppression since the arrival of European man has enabled the establishment of brush thickets devoid of herbaceous vegetation which the toads need for cover and feeding habitat. Historically, periodic fire played an important role in removing brush and maintaining native plants. Red imported fire ants can also have a devastating impact by killing young toads and altering local insect and arthropod populations that result in limiting the toad's food supply. All of the threats listed above, combined, can translate into disaster for an endangered species whose numbers are so small.

What does it do throughout the year?

The Houston Toad can most easily be detected during the breeding season when males can be heard calling. The males produce high, clear, 14-second trill songs as they call in and around shallow water. Males may call from December through June, but most breeding takes place in February and March on warm, humid evenings. The female lays her eggs in long strings in the water where they are fertilized by males as they are being deposited. Eggs hatch within seven days and tadpoles turn into tiny toads in as early as 15 days. Young toads leave the pond and spend their time feeding and growing in preparation for the next year's breeding season. Toads can be active year round under suitable temperature and moisture conditions. Their diet consists mainly of insects and other invertebrates.

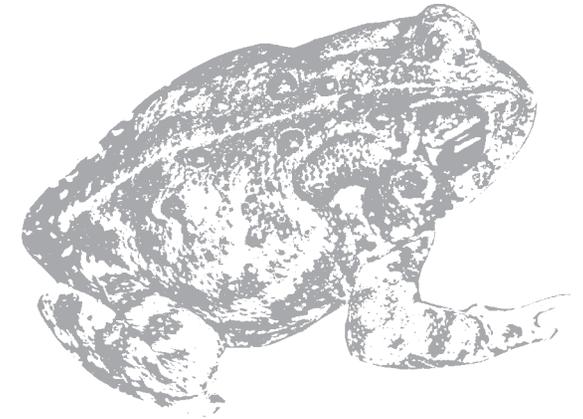
What is being done to help the Houston Toad?

Research on the life history, habitat requirements, and land management practices affecting the Houston Toad are being done to better plan for the toad's conservation needs. Efforts to provide information and management guidelines to the general public and landowners are a vital part of the recovery process.



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The HOUSTON TOAD



A Texas Endangered Species

The Houston Toad was probably once abundant in many parts of East Texas but today it is found in small numbers in only nine counties. The largest population is located in Bastrop State Park and the surrounding area. It was listed as endangered in 1970 and the few sites in Texas where it is still found are the only places in the world where it lives.

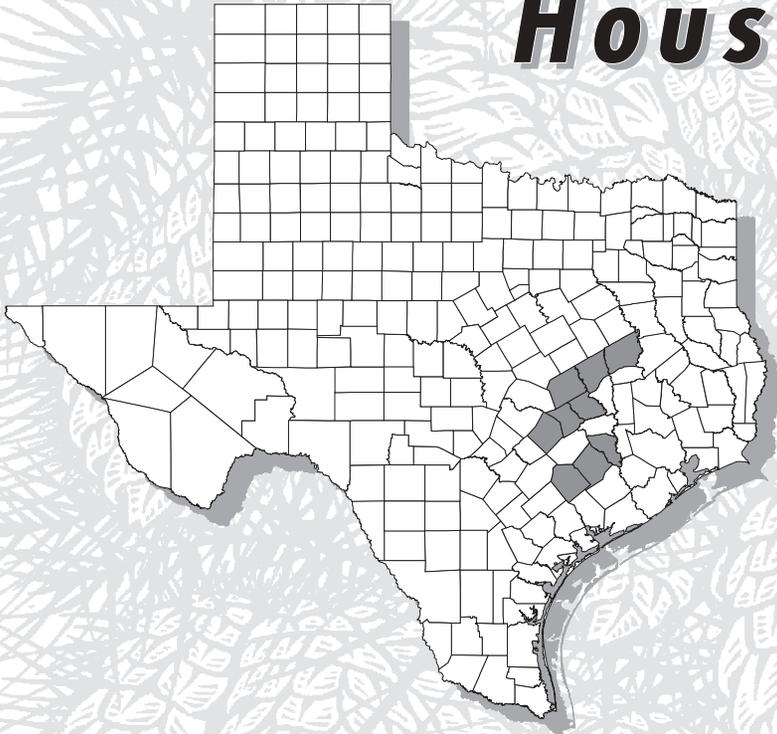
What does it look like?

The Houston Toad is 3 to 3.5 inches long and varies from light brown to gray or purplish gray, sometimes with green patches. The pale underparts often have small dark spots. Males have a dark throat, which appears bluish when distended during a breeding song. The toad's high-pitched trill can be heard at shallow ponds during spring.

Where does it live?

The Houston Toad is an amphibian associated with the deep sandy soils within the Post Oak Savannah vegetational area of east central Texas. The toads burrow into the sand for protection from cold weather in the winter and hot, dry conditions in the summer.

For breeding, including egg and tadpole development, Houston toads require still or slow-flowing, shallow bodies of water that persist for at least 30 days. These water sources may include temporary rain pools, flooded fields, wet areas associated with seeps or springs, or more permanent ponds containing shallow water. The toads do best in ponds without predatory fish.



The Houston Toad in Texas

What can YOU do to help the Houston Toads?

If you live near Houston toads, you can help by protecting pond habitat. Conservation and wise management of native vegetation is also important. You can help by sharing information you learn with friends and relatives. One of the best ways to learn is to take a "Toad Tour." Bastrop State Park has the largest population of Houston Toads and offers "Toad Tours" during the spring breeding season.

Management guidelines are available from Texas Parks and Wildlife for landowners and managers wishing to protect and improve habitat for the Houston Toad. Call Texas Parks and Wildlife at 800-792-1112.