

# Cane Toad (*Bufo marinus*) Fact Sheet



## General Facts about Cane Toads

Cane toads are ground dwelling amphibians that breed in slow flowing water and can tolerate salinity levels of up to 15%. The average adult size is 10-15cm (but can reach 23cm), and breed twice yearly laying up to 35000 eggs (DEH, 2005). Cane toads can live up to 5 years, and reach sexual maturity between 6-18months. Females lay distinctive eggs - gelatinous strands with 2 rows of black eggs.

The cane toad is a native of South and Central America. In 1935, 101 cane toads were released in Northern QLD in an unsuccessful attempt to control two kinds of beetles infesting sugarcane crops. They spread rapidly throughout Queensland, recorded in Brisbane in the 1940's and became established in the Northern Territory and Northern NSW.

Cane toads were purposely introduced into Byron Bay around 1964 and by the early 1980's they were accidentally established at Yamba via a consignment of timber (Seabrook, 1993).

The most southern recorded population is at Port Macquarie on the mid north coast of NSW. This is considered an isolated population resulting from accidental transportation of the toads to Port Macquarie. The current distribution in northern NSW is east of line between Kyogle and Lismore, south through Coraki to Woodburn (Clarke & Thomas, 2005).

Since their introduction, the range of cane toads has expanded through Australia's northern landscape at 27-50 kilometres a year, and around 1-5km per year in northern NSW (Seabrook, 1993).

## Cane Toads are considered a pest in Australia because:

- They are poisonous at all stages of their lifecycle. This poison can **kill pets and injure humans**.

- Cane toads can squirt a fine spray of poison over a short distance if they are handled roughly. Venom produced by their glands (paratoid glands) acts principally on the heart. The venom is absorbed through mucous membranes such as eyes, mouth and nose, and in humans may cause intense pain, temporary blindness and inflammation.
- Pets are commonly poisoned from **mouthing cane toads**. Signs of poisoning include profuse salivation, twitching, vomiting, shallow breathing, and collapse of the hind limbs. Death may occur by cardiac arrest within 15 minutes.
- They eat much more than native frogs and whilst their diet is predominantly ants, beetles and termites, they will eat anything that fits into their mouth including insects, small mammals and birds. Because the cane toad is rapidly expanding and has such a high reproduction rate, native fauna is at risk from either direct **predation**, or **competing** with cane toads for food and breeding sites.
- They commonly **poison many native animals** whose diet includes frogs, tadpoles and frogs' eggs. Australian native fauna that have been killed include goannas, birds, freshwater crocodiles, snakes, dingoes and marsupials such as the Northern Quoll.

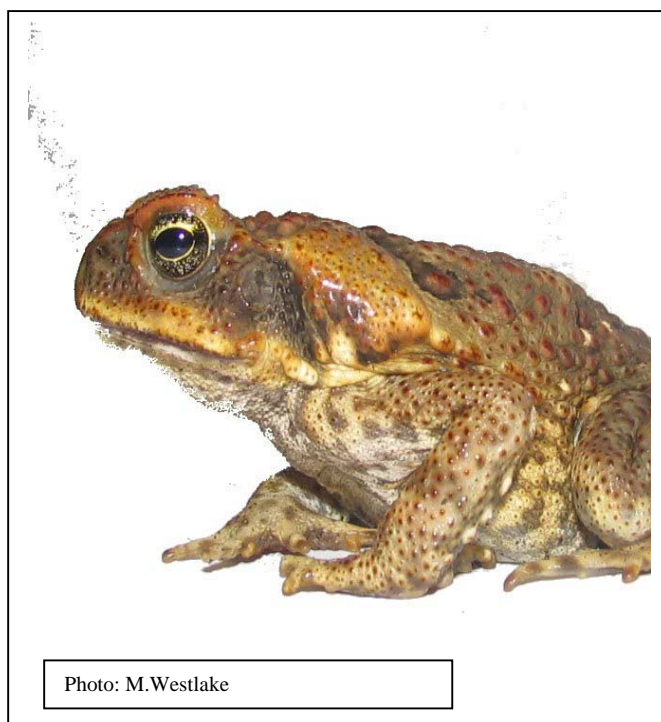


# How can we recognise a Cane Toad?

## ADULTS

- Large and warty with a distinct poisonous sack on each shoulder
- Pointy snout with a ridge above the eyes
- Colour varies from light yellow, brown, reddish brown to nearly black
- Dry skins, wet animals remain easy to hold
- Sit comparatively upright
- Short clumsy hops
- Females can weigh 2.5kg and have a length of 26cm!

**Call** – sounds like the putt-putt sound of a telephone dial tone.



## EGGS

- Look nothing like any Australian frog's eggs so they are easy to identify
- Small and black, laid in jelly like strands
- May be found in virtually any water - fresh or brackish; still or running; clear or muddy; deep or shallow; and natural or man-made, including swimming pools
- Strands remain intact when lifted from the water

## TADPOLES

- Shorter and narrower tails than native species
- Glossy black on both sides
- Abdomen is not transparent, check in good light preferably natural sunlight
- Noticeably pointed snouts
- A tendency to swarm in large groups away from the surface of the water





## How can we control Cane Toads?

WetlandCare Australia is working with the Northern River's Catchment Management Authority to implement cane toad control in the Clarence Catchment, NSW, a region subject to recent increases in cane toad numbers.

WetlandCare Australia is currently compiling all sightings of toads in localities in the Clarence, working to increase community education, and introduce control plans in priority sites to reduce the impact on threatened species.



Cane Toad round-up's are an effective control method



A Cane Toad trap in Action

## What Can I do?

You can help control cane toad numbers by controlling cane toads on your property. Control is best at the egg or adult stages, because cane toad tadpoles can be confused with some native tadpoles.

- **Remove toads.** Carry out nightly checks around your home. Toads can be easily caught by placing a plastic bag over them. The best and most humane disposal method is to chill the toad to 4 degrees, then freeze and bury. New cane toad traps are also an efficient means of capturing toads. Their most active season is from September to April.
- **Remove eggs.** Carry out regular checks of troughs, fish ponds and other permanent water holding structures. Pull the toad eggs out of the water and dispose of them by either putting them into your compost bin, burying them in the garden or leaving them on the lawn to dry in the sun.
- **Eliminate Breeding Sites.** Toads are restricted in the height they can jump, and they are inclined to lay their eggs in depressions and in water containers close to the ground. Retain grasses, sedges and other ground covers to hinder toad movement. Cane toads are clumsy in their movements and prefer short-grassed areas.
- **Manage waterholes.** Cane toads aren't "jumpers" and thick vegetation slows them down and prevents them accessing water. Controlling stock and allowing vegetation to grow around waterholes, for example, by not mowing, are effective at reducing successful breeding.
- **Report new sightings of cane toads in areas where you haven't seen one before to**

**WetlandCare Australia TEL: 02 66826169 or**

**Department of Environment & Conservation (NPWS) TEL: 02 66411500**

Information on cane toad abundance and distribution will aid management and control measures.

**References:** Department of Environment and Heritage. Threatened Species Scientific Committee (TSSC). The biological effects, including lethal toxic ingestion, by the cane toad *Bufo marinus*. **Advice to the Minister for the Environment and Heritage from the Threatened Species Scientific Committee (TSSC) on Amendments to the List of Key Threatening Processes under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (EPBC Act).** [www.deh.gov.au](http://www.deh.gov.au) date accessed 27/2/06.

Clarke, M., & Thomas, J. 2005. *Cane Toad Management in the Lower Clarence Valley, NSW*. Department of Environment and Conservation, Parks and Wildlife Division, North Coast Region.

Seabrook, W. 1993. *Habitat Use of the Cane Toad *Bufo Marinus*: Implications for Assessment of Impact and Control Strategies*. PhD Thesis, Department of Zoology University of Sydney, March 1993.

### For Further Information Contact

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