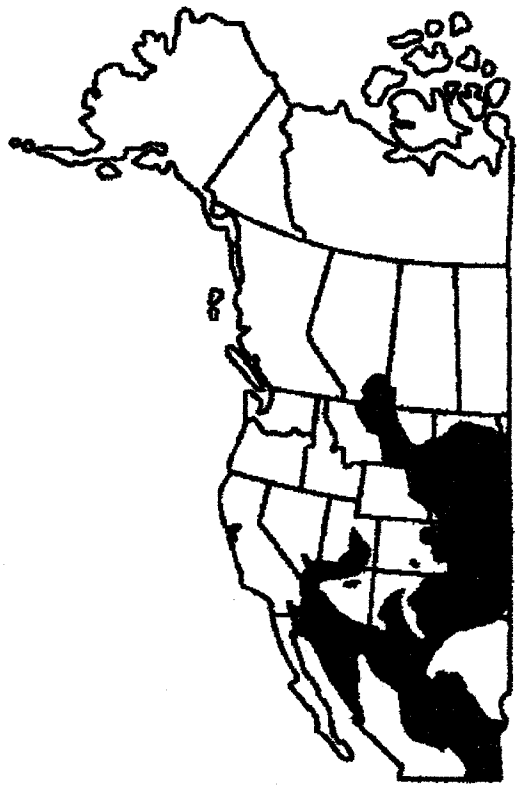
Great Plains Toad

Bufo cognatus
Family Bufonidae

Global Rank: G5
State Rank: S3 (NV, UT, WY); S3S4 (MT); S4 (CO); S5 (AZ, NM)

Distribution: Extends from the Great Plains from extreme southern Canada to San Luis Potosi, Mexico, and western Texas to extreme southeastern California. Of the 11 eleven western states, they have extensive habitat in Montana, New Mexico, and Arizona, and lesser amounts in semi-arid parts of Wyoming, Colorado, Utah, Nevada, and California.

Description: Adults reach up to 4 1/2 in. (11.2 cm.) in snout-vent length. Backs have well-defined, pale-bordered dark blotches in symmetric pairs. Cranial crests diverge widely toward the rear and loosely united on the snout to form a boss. There are sharp-edged inner tubercles on each hind foot. Coloration is usually light brown, olive, or gray above, with dusky, olive, or green blotches, sometimes with a narrow middorsal stripe. Whitish below and usually unspotted. Young have numerous small, brick-red tubercles, and "v" shaped crests. Adult males have dark loose skin of the deflated vocal sac often partly concealed by a pale skin flap. Voice is a harsh explosive clatter lasting up to a minute.



Current range of the Great Plains toad

Reproduction: Breeding behavior reflects a relatively-short, high-density pattern related to spring and summer rainfall. Rain-filled ditches and temporary ponds are usually selected for breeding although permanent ponds and irrigated fields may also be used. Females are usually larger than males. The average clutch size is over 11,000 eggs (range 1,342 to 45,054). Some females may lay two clutches a year. The period from egg laying to when toadlets go through metamorphosis and emerge varies from 18 to 49 days.

Food: The diet of these toads has been found to be about 47 percent ants and 44 percent termites. They are also known to eat moths, caterpillars, flies, beetles, and other small arthropods.

Habits: Inhabits prairies, deserts, and agricultural areas, especially along floodplains of streams. This toad normally only enters water to breed. Inactive periods are spent burrowed in the ground, under rocks and wood, or in cracks of drying mud. Usually nocturnal in activity.

Management Implications: The toad can store as much as 30 percent of its body weight as water. This allows it to survive long periods of drought and to forage far from its water source. It may hybridize with other toads within its range.

Important References: Stebbins, R.C. 1985. A field guide to western reptiles and amphibians. The Peterson Field Guide Series, Houghton Mifflin Company, New York, NY; Degenhardt, W.G., C.W. Painter, and A.H. Price. 1996. Amphibians and reptiles of New Mexico. University of New Mexico Press, Albuquerque, NM; Hammerson, G.A. 1999. Amphibians and reptiles in Colorado. University Press of Colorado, Niwot, CO.