



The Endangered Western Leopard Toad



Protecting
endangered
the Western Leopard Toad

What is a Western Leopard Toad?

The Western Leopard Toad (WLT) is an endangered species that lives and breeds in the low-lying regions of Cape Town, with further populations along the coast to the Agulhas Plain. The WLT is larger than any other toad in the area – females reach 140 mm in length. They have characteristic patterns on their body similar to a panther's spots (a pale chocolate brown rosette outlined in yellow), with two red-to-brown glands on the head behind the eyes; sometimes they have a cream line down their spine.

The WLT (*Amietophrynus pantherinus*) is also known as the Snoring Toad (because of the male's mating call), the August Toad (the breeding season) or Panther Toad (because of its rosettes).

Why are WLTs endangered?

The WLT is confined to the sandy coastal lowlands of the Western Cape. However, many of their breeding wetlands have been drained, filled in and built on, and their feeding areas are in the midst of urban areas. They also have to survive an increasing number of other threats, such as nutrients, chemicals and poisons leaching into the wetlands, and the creation of artificial barriers to their movements, such as walls, pavements and roads. In addition, exotic ducks, Sacred, Glossy and Hadedda Ibis eat young toads, while alien fish species, such as Bass and Sharp-toothed Catfish, prey on the tadpoles. Invasive aquatic plants also encroach on their breeding sites. During the breeding season, when toads migrate to and from breeding sites, many of them are killed by road traffic.

What is so important about these toads?

Besides being a good insect pest controller, the WLT is an 'indicator species' – in other words, the presence of the toads indicates healthy Cape Town biodiversity, well-functioning wetlands and environment-friendly gardens. Many of the things we can do to conserve the WLT population will also help other wildlife to survive in our urban environment.

Road deaths of Western Leopard Toads are partly responsible for their endangered status.

When are WLTs most vulnerable?

- From late July to September, during breeding and migration season, road traffic is the biggest threat. So, watch the road, and don't drive over toads as they cross the roads to their breeding sites.
- In August/September, once the eggs hatch, their tadpoles are vulnerable to alien fish and ducks.
- From October to December, when toadlets leave their ponds in search of new territory, large numbers drown in swimming pools, or are killed when people use motorised lawnmowers.

WLTs take at least two years to reach sexual maturity. Around August each year, the males congregate to call in choruses from open water for about a week to attract females. During this migration and breeding period, the adults are most vulnerable, as many are killed by motor vehicles as the toads cross the roads. When the tadpoles mature in October to December, the toadlets emerge from the ponds to find suitable feeding areas. Newly emerged toadlets are the size of a small fingernail, and vulnerable to drowning in swimming pools, and other garden hazards such as lawnmowers. Toadlets and adults forage away from water most of the year. Because Cape Town is mostly built up, most of the WLT population feeds in urban gardens, parks and public open spaces. Many gardens are however not toad-friendly.





What can you do?

JOIN THE CENSUS

Each year in areas where these toads occur and breed, a census of WLT populations is undertaken.

JOIN YOUR LOCAL TOAD CONSERVATION ORGANISATION

Visit www.leopardtoad.co.za, www.toadnuts.ning.com, or contact your local nature reserve (details available on www.capetown.gov.za/environment).

HELP TOADS ACROSS ROADS

Meet up with local groups to help toads across roads during their mating season.

HAVE A TOAD-FRIENDLY GARDEN

Concrete walls are barriers, but toads can move through some fences. Learn how to make your garden toad-friendly. (See box alongside)

PHOTOGRAPH EACH WLT YOU SEE

The markings on these toads are like fingerprints, and your photographs can provide an identification record of individual toads. Take a photograph of the back of each WLT you see and upload it on the WLT website, www.leopardtoad.co.za.

SLOW DOWN!

At night, when you see the road warning signs for toads, slow down and avoid driving over any toads, especially when the weather is wet and they are most active.

DON'T MOVE LEOPARD TOADS

Never move Leopard Toads or any other animals from where you find them. Even if you have the best intentions, you risk introducing disease or parasites to animal populations that were previously unaffected. You also risk contaminating genetically distinct populations, or introducing animals to areas where they have never naturally occurred.

Where are WLTs found in Cape Town?

- BERGVLIET
- CAPE FLATS
- CLOVELLY
- CONSTANTIA
- DIEP RIVER
- FISH HOEK
- GLENCAIRN
- GRASSY PARK
- HOUT BAY
- KIRSTENHOF
- KOMMETJIE
- LAKESIDE
- NOORDHOEK
- OBSERVATORY
- SCARBOROUGH
- STRANDFONTEIN
- TOKAI
- ZEEKOEVLEI



How 'toad-friendly' is your garden?

- Do you have toad holes (gaps of at least 50 mm wide and 40 mm high at ground level) in your perimeter fence or wall? Or a fence that toads can move through?
- Is your garden indigenous?
- Do you have birds such as Cape White-eye, Cape Bulbul, Olive Thrush, Orange-breasted or Double-collared Sunbirds, Cape Robin-chats in your garden?
- Do you avoid using insecticides and pesticides in your garden?
- Do you have creepers and herbaceous or shrubby borders rather than bare walls?
- Do you have well-fed cats and dogs?
- Do you have lawn or groundcover rather than paving?
- Does your pool or pond have a 'toad saver' to prevent toads from drowning?
- Do you have a compost heap for your kitchen and garden waste?
- Do you have permanent piles of wood or stones, or other hiding places for toads and their prey?

A toad-friendly garden will have more 'yes' than 'no' answers.

For more information

Please visit www.leopardtoad.co.za, join the community network at www.toadnuts.ning.com, or contact your local nature reserve (details available on www.capetown.gov.za/environment). You can also send an e-mail to Leopard.Toad@capetown.gov.za.