

# HERPTILES OF P.E.I.

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In a previous newsletter we began a three-part series on the herpetofauna of Prince Edward Island. That article covered the first of the two groups found in the province - the salamanders. The series continues in this issue with the second amphibian group - the frogs and toads.

## PART II - THE FROGS AND TOAD

Frogs and toads are members of the class Amphibia. They are characterized by long hind legs used in jumping and lack of a tail in the adult stage. Collectively they are referred to as anurans, a Greek word meaning "without a tail". In general toads live mainly on land and have thick tough warty skin which helps to slow down evaporation. Frogs have smooth skin, slippery with mucus, and prefer damp habitats. Toads are usually slower moving and poorer jumpers than frogs and have broader bodies and larger eyes. Male frogs and toads have the ability to inflate their throat pouches with air which, when forced out over their vocal cords, makes a call distinctive to the particular species.

Frogs and toads live throughout the world in warm damp fresh-water habitats. Toads are generally more land based and frogs are more aquatic. In North America north of Mexico there are about 100 species and subspecies of frogs and toads.

During the winter frogs and toads hibernate underground or burrow into the mud at the bottom of ponds. They emerge during mild damp spring weather and migrate to nearby ponds. Males soon begin calling to attract females and other males to the breeding sites. Eggs are laid in a gelatinous mass, usually in water. The tadpole first hatches with external gills which are soon replaced by internal ones similar to those of a fish. Gradually hind legs develop, the tail shortens, front legs appear, lungs develop and the tadpole is transformed into an air-breathing adult. Soon after it reaches full adult size.

Tadpoles feed on algae and other small plants, but adult frogs and toads are carnivorous. They eat worms, insects, spiders and other small animals. Tongues are long and sticky and attached at the front of the mouth. This permits the tongue to extend a considerable distance to catch insects.

The classification of the four frogs and one toad recorded for P.E.I. (after Cook 1967) is as follows.

Class Amphibia

Order: Salientia

Family: Bufonidae (Toads)

Bufo americanus americanus Holbrook - American Toad

Family: Hylidae (Tree Frogs)

Hyla crucifer crucifer Wied - Northern Spring Peeper

Family: Ranidae (Pond Frogs)

Rana clamitans melanota (Rafinesque) - Green Frog

Rana sylvatica LeConte - Wood Frog

Rana pipiens Schreber - Leopard Frog

### 1. American Toad (Bufo americanus)

Adult toads range in colour from greenish to reddish brown and have a light line down the centre of the back. A parotid gland is located behind the eye and light or dark markings are scattered over the body and legs. These markings are often associated with roughened lumps on the skin known as warts. Warts contain poison glands which, contrary to popular belief, have no effect on the skin and do not cause warts. However, in contact with the eyes or mouth the secretions are toxic.