

28# Toads

Stop and listen. Do you hear a high-pitched, whirring trill? If it's nighttime in late April to mid-June, chances are male American toads are calling from the marsh. A few weeks after the males start calling, the first females return to the marsh and call back.

Breeding sounds like a toad music festival. Up to 90% of the toads mate over only two to three days. Courtship is so intense that males often drown other males as they scramble for a mate; sometimes a female has the same fate.

One female can lay up to eight THOUSAND eggs in a single clutch! Her eggs carpet the marsh bottom as she moves along with the male on her back, fertilizing the eggs she releases into the water.

Eggs hatch to become free-swimming tadpoles. The tadpoles "school" like fish; their little black forms wiggling along in the hundreds, stirring up food from the bottom.

Two months after the adults lay their eggs the tadpoles grow arms and legs, a more definite head, and absorb their tails to become tiny toadlets. By late June, they can look like a swarm of small black crickets scrambling through the grass searching for any insects that fit in their mouths. Soon these rapidly growing toads are found sitting and hopping throughout the entire Lakeshore Preserve.

Keep your eyes peeled and watch your step for the adult toads, which resemble dark, warty frogs. They jump, but are easy to catch. Don't hurt them—they won't hurt you. And they won't give you warts!