

Ode to the Toad

By Kristin Van Alstine

February 6, 2009

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Beefy the cane toad.

My favorite American toad Burt.

Turkey Burger the Great Plains toad. The Toad ... What can I say. It's one of my favorite creatures on the planet. Toads have been a part of my life for decades, and yet I never get tired of these warty little wonders. They always bring a smile to my face, no matter what they are doing.

Bufology 101: Anatomy of a North American Toad

One of the features that I love the most is their delightfully bumpy skin. Their rugged exterior and color patterns give them a camouflaged appearance and help them stealthily blend in with their environment. They are sturdy and built low to the ground, carrying their weaponry discretely on their backs in sacs just behind their eyes called parotoid glands. Their secretions help to ward off predators and keep them safe from any who try to snack on what looks to be a tasty treat. They also inflate their lungs with air until they resemble a beach ball, so they appear much larger than they actually are. If these tactics don't work, they have their backup plan of peeing all over the enemy. This is normally after they have failed to escape while engaging in evasive maneuvers. The combination of this and their bunny-like agility make them a force to be reckoned with!

Another fabulous feature of the toad are their bright, stunning eyes, which are set in an angular, ridged face. Their expression is quite serious looking, as if they are deep in thought. The amazing thing is that they can track prey while turning their head, which is located on a body that is apparently neckless. It seems as if their head is connected directly to their shoulders with no neck in between, yet their head turns freely. While hunting for a meal, and even after they capture it, they display one of the strangest behaviors that can be witnessed in a toad. When an insect is spotted, the long middle toes on their hind feet jump up and down repeatedly and it looks like they are tapping their toes. It's a very amusing sight to see.

Toads also possess quite a loud singing voice. The males do, anyway. They can be heard by the thousands from bodies of water during mating season, calling to all the lady toads, looking for dates. In the off season, they save their singing voices and instead, make shorter chirping sounds in more conversational toad tones. My toads employ this language when chatting with their friends, for expressing disgust at being hassled by me, or for when they are hopped upon by other toads. The fact is that some toads just like to complain more than others do.

So, when you take a 360-degree view of a toad, and put all of the bumpy parts together, what do you get? A loveable, hopping, bug-eating machine.

-The Toad Talker

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