

What is a cane toad and why is there so much talk about them?

The cane toad is a large, warty, poisonous amphibian and is considered to be one of the worst invasive species in the world. Their current population trend is increasing as they are outcompeting native species for resources, and doing so fervently in SW Florida. Their diet consists largely of insects, but they'll eat almost anything, including small birds, other reptiles and amphibians, and small mammals.

Let us begin with the general features of cane toads. They are brown or gray, stout, and fat with a chunky body. They have short legs with dry warty skin. Confusingly, all toads are frogs, but all frogs are not toads.

Cane toads lay between 8,000 and 30,000 eggs at a time, and at any time of year. Because of their rapid population growth, and the danger they pose to our pets and native animal population, it is critical to know how to identify them— and know what to do with them once you've identified a toad as a cane toad.

The cane toad can be deadly when animals bite, lick, or eat them. This creature is toxic in all stages of life, and they secrete a sticky, milky poison called bufotoxin which affects the heart and brain. Note: cane toad secretion of the parotid glands is highly irritating to human eyes and cuts on the skin. Handle cane toads with gloves and extreme care to avoid toxins in the eyes.

It is also important to know what to do if your pet contacts the toxins of this deadly creature. See Figures 2 and 3. The white, sticky, milky substance shown is what carries the toxins. Ingesting or licking a cane toad can cause these symptoms: an animal may start acting strangely with frantic or disoriented behavior, shaking their head back and forth, may have brick-red gums, seizures, and foaming of the mouth. Immediately wash out your pet's mouth with a damp cloth and wipe gums, tongue, and roof of the mouth to remove the milky, white toxin, making your way to the nearest emergency veterinarian; be sure to call ahead and let them know that your pet is on the way and why. Keep the animal (and yourself) calm.

Determining which toads are cane toads can be confusing and scary if you are unfamiliar and enjoy the outdoors in our beautiful neighborhood. Chances are, if you find a toad that astounds you with its size, more than likely, it is a cane toad. Cane toads generally range in size from 6 to 9 inches in length! They can be confused with the native southern toad; however, adult cane toads are much larger than adult southern toads which only grow to a maximum of approximately 3 to 4 inches.

In figures 1, 2, and 4, notice the large, triangular shaped gland on the side of the cane toad's head/neck area. This is a true characteristic of the cane toad. In figure 3, one can clearly see an example of the flat, non-crested head of the cane toad.



Cane toads are rarely seen in the day as they are nocturnal creatures. They are most active from September to April. The most-commonly-heard sound made by the cane toad are deep, rolling calls. These sounds are far-carrying and can often be heard from a significant distance. To hear the nighttime sounds of the cane toad: [Click Here](#)



(Photo by: Steve A. Johnson, University of Florida)

Now that the cane toad can be identified, what are we to do about them? It is illegal to transport cane toads to another location. Therefore, collect poisonous cane toads by hand (with gloves on or with a bag in hand) and humanely euthanize them by putting them into a disposable container in the refrigerator for 4 hours; then place into the freezer for a minimum of 24 hours. Once they have been "frozen," you can dispose of them securely in your weekly garbage pick-up. Alternatively, you can attempt to spray 20% benzocaine sunburn spray or lidocaine ointment on the back or lower belly of the toad. After a few minutes the toad will be rendered unconscious. Place in a baggie and store in the freezer for a week before putting in the trash. These are set forth as humane protocols by the University of Florida Department of Ecology and Conservation. For anyone who is not comfortable with these and wishes to acquire the services of a professional, there are an abundance of local companies that have monthly contracts or can be hired as needed.