



BCT Stewardship Journal: April 2025

Fowler's Toad: My Favorite Neighbors

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One of Cape Cod's many amphibian residents include Fowler's Toads (*Anaxyrus fowleri*). I am pleased to say that a family of six happily resides in my window box in Eastham!

You can find these toads throughout the Cape in dunes, lakes, rivers, beach shorelines, deciduous woodlands, and other areas with sandy, gravel-heavy soils. Fowler's toads have a unique mix of colors that include brown, gray, green, and/or red; Males are generally darker colored than females. Their bellies are cream colored with one dark spot, and their backs sport a white stripe down the middle and clusters of three warts enclosed by dark patches. These toads can range anywhere between 4 to 8 centimeters in length. Features to identify the Fowler's Toad from the American Toad include their cranial crest (bony ridges on their head between the eyes) and their parotoid glands (poison producing sacs) behind their eyes.

From May to June, breeding occurs in shallow, still waters of temporary pools, ponds, wetlands, bays, and rivers. Males are responsible for some very romantic croaks, often described as a rapid, whistling "waahh" scream that lasts one to four seconds. This call can change with body size and temperature, and males often use thermoregulation to trick females looking for the largest available male to breed with- so sneaky! Females lay 7,000 to 10,000 eggs attached to two jelly-like strings often several meters in length. These eggs develop and hatch within a week, beginning the metamorphosis to terrestrial juvenile frogs between three weeks and two months' time. Sexual maturity is reached at three years, and these toads have an average lifespan of five years.



Fowler's Toad egg strands like these can often be found in vernal pools!



Fowler's Toad spotted in my window box in Eastham.

During nighttime or on cloudy days, Fowler's Toads prey on ants, beetles, other insects, and invertebrates like spiders and mollusks, often by sitting and waiting for food to come to them. While amphibian evolution has bestowed the valuable adaptations of defensive coloration (aka camouflage) and playing dead to evade predators, they can still fall prey to snakes, American bullfrogs, birds, fish, turtles, and raccoons.

During the winter months, Fowler's toads dig deep down into sand to pass the frost line and safely hibernate until they emerge from their shelters as Winter turns to Spring.

If you're interested in embarking on a frog-spotting expedition, take a walk on BCT's Eddy Sister's Trail and watch for small movements in the brush near the cranberry bog dam and the point of interest #10 post. While it is easier to recognize frogs from their call, it is possible to discern decaying leaves and exposed dirt from these small beauties with enough patience.