

HERPTILE 12 (3)

Dear Sir,

One of the greatest ongoing threats to Australian herpetofauna remains largely ignored.
It is the Cane toad (*Bufo marinus*). (plate 1)

These grotesque toads were originally introduced in 1915 from their native Americas, in the mistaken belief that they would control the Grayback cane beetle (*Dermodiplosis albopictum*); they have overrun the entire state of Queensland, and are systematically eliminating most forms of wildlife (directly or indirectly).
The toads eat anything that is small enough to fit into their mouths. They are highly poisonous (skin secretions/glands) so whatever eats them also dies. The venom is so toxic that reptiles and other animals are often found dead with the toads still in their mouths. These losses are then passed up the food chain, so that the end result is that most carnivores are dying out. The herbivores, such as wallabies etc., are no longer subject to predation so invariably one species becomes dominant at the expense of all others (thereby usually causing the extermination of all other species).

Frog eating snakes seem to have borne the brunt of the 'toad invasion'. A number of formerly very common snakes have now disappeared from areas where the toads occur, these include the Death Adder (*Acanthophis antarcticus*, *A. praelongus*), the Tiger Snake (*Notechis scutatus*) and the Red-bellied Black snake (*Pseudechis porphyriacus*).
Specifically an estimated thirty species of native frogs are already extinct, some possibly still unknown to science. A similar number of species in Queensland face imminent extinction unless the toad is eradicated immediately. Massive numbers of reptile species (including those that kill vermin such as rats and mice) are dying out and even the so-called beautiful native mammals (Tiger cats, the rare coastal wallabies etc.) are, indirectly, under threat from the toads.

... And this is only Queensland. The worst is yet to come. The toads are now moving out in all directions and are a threat in parts of the Northern Territory and NSW. The toads will, if not checked over run most parts of mainland Australia within sixty years and consequently destroy an enormous part of our wildlife. World Heritage areas such as Kakadu (N.T.) will be meaningless if destroyed by the toads. Introduced water buffaloes trampling over swamp vegetation and wiping out frogs and crocodile nests are already making a mockery of wetland conservation in this area.

No Governmental (Federal, State or local) or Wildlife authority have taken any actions to eliminate the toads. In order to minimise the damage already caused the Australian authorities should invest what would be peanuts and eradicate them from Australia before they eliminate what wildlife remains and ruin what native and semi-native bushland is left.

I hope that by publishing this letter your Journal will help to inform non-Australians of a major threat to our herpetofauna and the generally lax attitude most Australians have towards many conservation issues.

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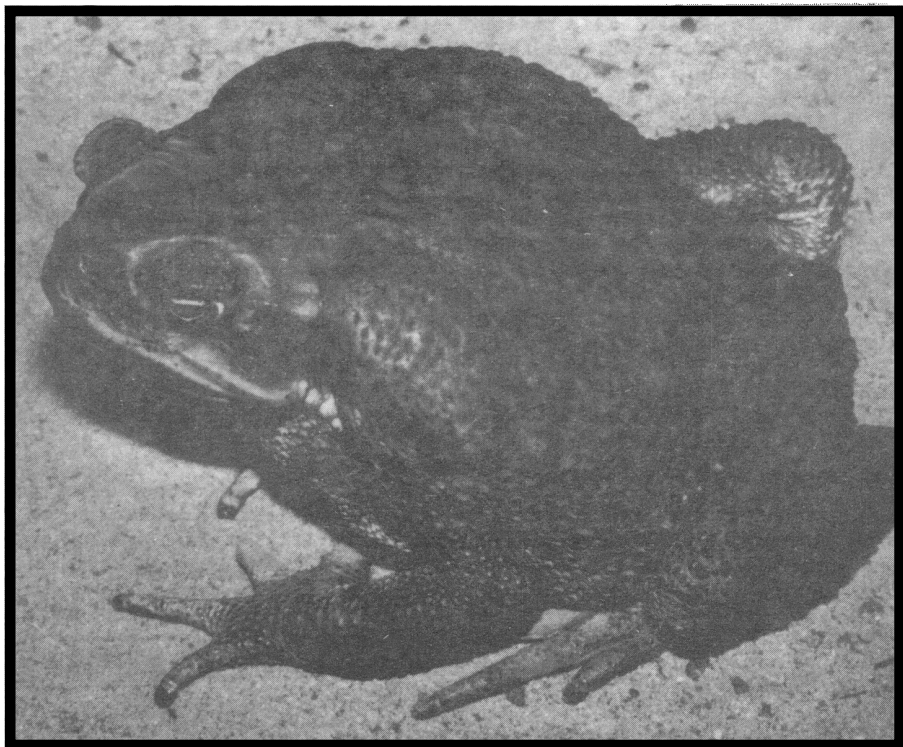


PLATE 1.