



WILDLIFE NOTES

Colorado River Toad

Bufo alvarius

Distinguishing Features

The endangered Colorado River toad is New Mexico's largest toad. Colorado River toads differ from other New Mexico toads as they have a combination of large size, swollen glands on each side of the neck and hind legs, and warty skin. These glands are longer than the head and extend lower than the eardrum.

Descriptive Details

The color of the back is dark brown, olive, brownish-green, or grayish, and the belly is cream or light-colored and is usually unmarked. There is a white marking at or behind the corner of the mouth. The warts on the hind legs are noticeable against the smooth skin, and smaller warts on the back are somewhat light-colored (rimmed with black in young) and some may be pale orange or rusty. The head crests are prominent, and they are bordered by long, kidney-shaped glands that extend

tend diagonally downward.

Distribution

The Colorado River toad ranges from southeastern California to southwestern New Mexico, southward through most of Sonora to northern Sinaloa, Mexico. In New Mexico, this toad is found only in Hidalgo County, where it has been sighted along the Arizona border and eastward to near Animas, and southeast of the Animas Mountains in lower Deer Creek. Other areas of habitat for the Colorado River toad are Guadalupe Canyon and the Cloverdale region.

Biology

This toad is seen in areas featuring such plants as mesquite, creosote bush and other shrubs, plus forbs and grasses at elevations around 5,000 feet. This toad eats snails, beetles, grasshoppers, spiders, lizards, mice, and even

amphibians such as the Great Plains toad (*B. cognatus*), and Couch's spadefoot toad (*Scaphiopus couchi*.)

Colorado River toads breed during spring and

summer rains. Adult toads appear just before these rains begin, gathering at temporary pools and other bodies of water where they croak constantly. Eggs are laid in long, jelly-coated strings, and they average several thousand per string. The larval period lasts no more than a month.

When alarmed, toads assume a butting pose – with the glands directed toward the intruder. Their skin secretion is toxic to dogs and other animals.

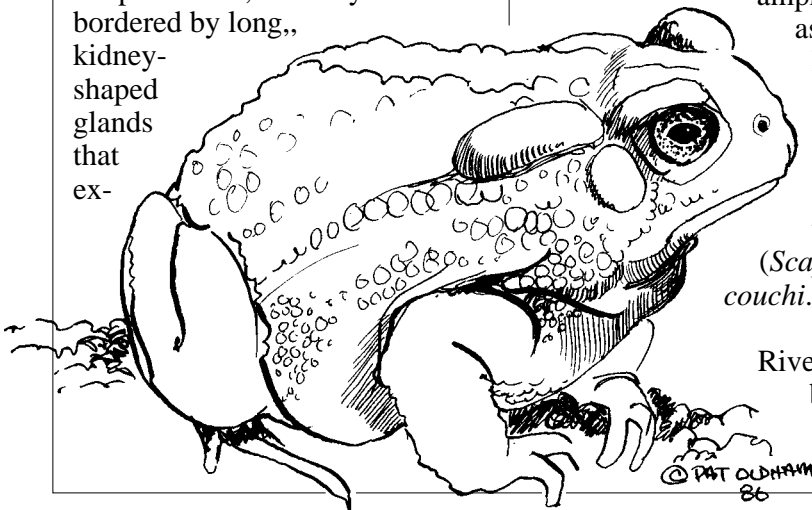
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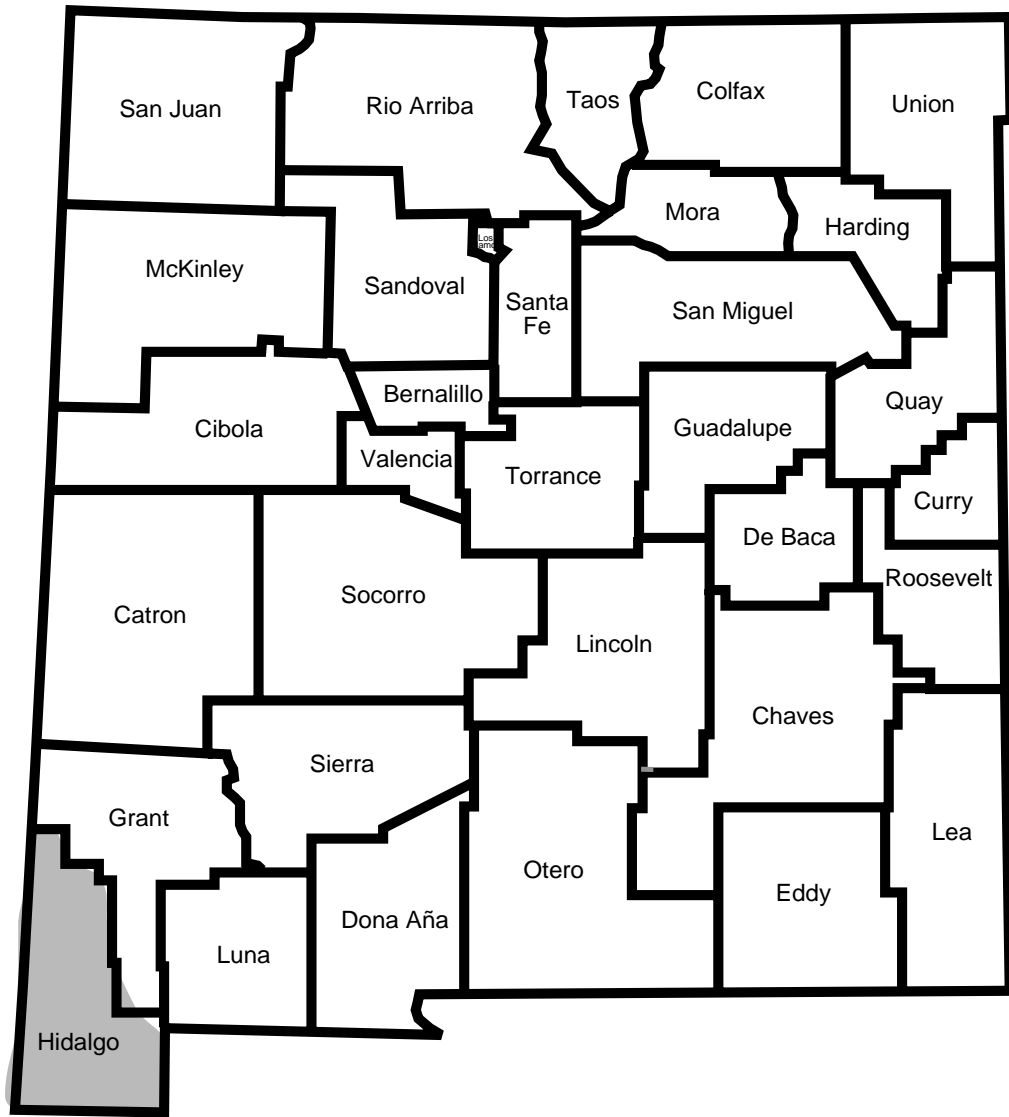
The status of this toad is fairly secure, except in areas that have been degraded by construction of roads and housing. The most critical need for the Colorado River toad is water for breeding, which can be lost through diversion, rapid runoff, and pollution. Also, toads are killed by automobiles and intolerant or malicious humans. In New Mexico, this toad is localized, and populations can be reduced or even made extinct as a result of these activities.

Conservation

The major step toward conserving the Colorado River Toad in New Mexico is the protection of its habitat. Also helpful in conservation is the continued prevention of collecting and other forms of taking.

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Shaded area denotes regular occurrence

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