

In Defense of Toads and Activism

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Sonoran Desert
Toad (*Bufo
alvarius*). Photo by
Eric W. Stitt.



Last month as I glanced at the newspaper's editorial page I came across a letter that, in a nasty way, blamed toads for poisoning a dog and the media for not alerting pet owners to that danger. According to the writer, toad poisons were to blame for his dog's convulsions, and that nobody had warned him of this danger. His conclusion was that he felt that anything resembling a toad was a threat. The implication was that he would kill them all, whenever found, and that you, the reader, should do the same.

Well, I don't write many letters to the editor, but this one screamed for a response. My letter was published in the Arizona Daily Star on July 18th.

Don't kill toads, watch your dog

Re: The July 13 letter to the editor "Keep your pets away from toads"

After reading this toxic letter, it seemed time to do some toad defending. These delightful critters already face enormous pressures from diminishing habitat, introduced predators and poisons. Many organizations and volunteers are dedicated to helping them.

Yes, toads can have varying degrees of toxins on their skins and can occasionally poison dogs. But, that is not a common occurrence.

When a poisoning does happen it is not the fault of the toad, or the dog; it is the fault of the owner, who has likely left their dog unattended, and the results fall on their shoulders.

So when I read a comment like "get rid of anything resembling a toad that your dog could grab," I have to respond with "leave the toads alone, keep a

better watch on your dog". I think it is much the better solution.

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After writing this letter I began thinking about activism and involvement. So many things are negatively impacting our environment. And, although many people would view my involvement with these issues as somewhat proactive, I feel as if I am not doing enough to help with the causes that I am most passionate about. So, I began asking myself: How do you best and most effectively protect the wildlife we love? Is it by writing letters (only 4 or 5 people I know read my letter)? Perhaps by doing more talks on wildlife? Talking with the neighbors after they have found (or sometimes killed) an animal? Perhaps the best thing is to yell at people after they have run over an animal? Most of these activities affect only a small group of people, and at times it seems so ineffective.

Perhaps I should be joining protests and maybe sitting high in ancient trees (painful here in our Saguaro forests)? Should I take a boat ride with Greenpeace? Perhaps the publicity generated by these groups does help reach more people.

But, I have always worked the middle ground. I've worked for consensus between divergent groups while leaving the extreme positions to others. While I have always admired outfits like Greenpeace, I have not been out there on the boats. And frankly, I probably will not, it's just not me. But I have an admiration for those on the fringe (as long as they are not hurting people or animals).

However, I do think that the interesting part of these "extreme" groups is that their positions help redefine the middle ground. And this allows me to slide out farther than I could before, and still be in the middle. Overall, I believe this benefits environmental positions.

Perhaps the best way to effect change would be to become more political. After all, until attitudes change in Phoenix and Washington politically, our beautiful desert and its wildlife will continue to be bulldozed.

You can see from the repeated use of the word "perhaps" here that the only conclusion I came to is that there is no ONE course of action. We need to do all of the above, or as many as our time, abilities, and comfort level allow. We need to rededicate ourselves to work the cause. That means taking advantage of all forums possible to present our views and educate. So, I will be warming up my computer (and my brain) to write letters to the editor when needed. And for me, keep working that middle ground. And of course, VOTE.

Y.C.