



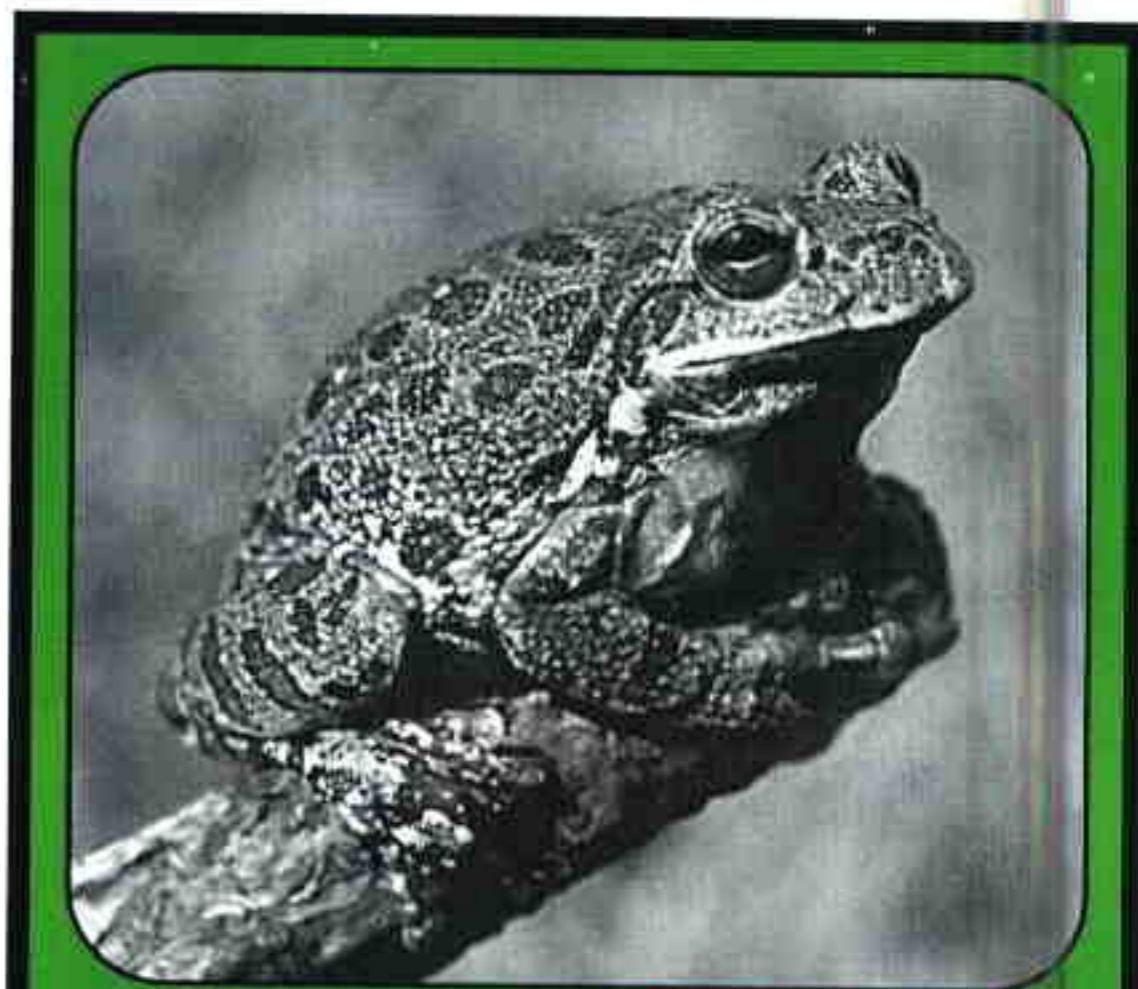
The Spadefoot Toad

Short, stubby legs kick and push the dirt. Clumps of dirt flip up. He lowers himself into the hole he has made. Soon his green and brown body is completely covered. His golden eyes are the only part of him that can be seen. But that soon changes.

As the morning sun rises, he closes his eyes and scoots himself deeper into his hole. The Eastern spadefoot toad, now completely buried, is a burrowing toad.

Like other burrowing toads and frogs, the spadefoot toad spends most of his life under the ground. He will come out at night to eat; then he returns to the comfort of his burrow before the heat of the sun is upon him. During hot or dry times, the spadefoot toad stays cool and moist in his burrow. During extremely dry times, he can stay buried for weeks or months.

Eastern spadefoot toads are not common in appearance. Unlike the plain brown American toad, the spadefoot toad's two-inch body is mostly brown with two yellow-green, splotchy stripes. These stripes start behind each eye and curve down to the toad's rear. The rest of the body is marbled yellow-green and brown. The belly is white and pink. Covering the top of the body (not the belly) is a sprinkling of raised, tiny, orange spots. This kaleidoscope of colors makes him quite unique.



The black and gold eyes of the spadefoot toad are also uncommon. The pupil is vertical, unlike the horizontal pupils of many other species of toad. Possibly, the vertical pupil has something to do with the fact

that he is a burrowing toad. Other burrowing species, including Australia's mallee frog, also have vertical pupils.

But why is he called a spadefoot toad? Break down the compound word "spadefoot" into two words. Spade means "a shovel-like tool for digging." Foot...well you know what a foot is. So a spadefoot toad is a toad with shovels on his feet. Which feet? Just his back feet. On each back foot, he has a miniature "shovel." It's rather like a fingernail. He uses it to dig backwards! As he digs, he backs himself into the hole. Pretty clever! In this way, he can always be keeping an eye out for any predators. He wouldn't want to have his face in the dirt while a snake is sneaking up behind him.

Why do spadefoot toads bury themselves anyway? They are avoiding the heat of the day. Think about how you feel on a hot, summer day. You want shade. You want something cool to drink. The toad is thinking the same thing. The layers of dirt below the surface are cooler. There is more moisture down there too. The spadefoot toad has a special ability to "drink" moisture through his skin. The spadefoot toad is a unique creation.

by Melanie Freeman

