



# Wind in the Willows Fact File: Toad

## In Wind in the Willows:

Extrovert, enthusiastic, extravagant and outrageous. Prone to mood swings – at one moment, reckless and boastful, and, at the next, crushed and contrite.

## In the wild:

### Appearance

The common toad, *Bufo bufo*, is one of only three species of frog and toad native to the British Isles (although they are absent from Ireland). Often mistaken for the common frog, toads have a heavier and more rounded body shape and have rough, warty skin. Toads have shorter back legs and appear to walk. They are usually brown with a pale underside and dark blotches and may live up to six years.

### Diet

Toads are mainly nocturnal feeders and use their long tongues to catch their prey. They eat slugs, snails and other creepy crawlies such as insects, woodlice and spiders.

### Behaviour

Toads spend the majority of their lives on land and usually only return to water to breed. Over the winter months toads hibernate, living under logs and stones, in compost heaps or underground burrows.

At the start of the breeding season toads migrate to ponds to spawn. Every year, thousands of toads are killed as they try to cross busy roads to reach their breeding grounds. Breeding activity peaks during March and April. The Female lays her eggs in strings of jelly that she wraps around pond plants. After a few weeks, the eggs hatch and tadpoles emerge. As the tadpoles begin to metamorphose, they develop front and back legs and lose their tail. Their jaws develop and they become carnivorous.

By late summer juvenile toads leave the water, often after a rain storm, and remain on land for two to three years until they reach maturity and breed for the first time.

### Dangers

Toads have defence strategies to prevent themselves being eaten – their skin is toxic making them distasteful to predators and they attempt to scare away enemies by rising up on their hind legs and puffing up their bodies to make themselves appear larger.

