

WILDLIFE OF VICTORIA PARK

by John Serrao

SOUTHERN TOAD

As soon as the spring rains finally arrive, take a walk or drive to the nearest pond or wetland and just listen. You may hear the voices of several kinds of frogs that had been awaiting the arrival of the rainy season to breed. Each species has its own unique “song” (actually more like a croak, chirp, or grunt) to attract females into the water where their eggs are deposited and their tadpoles later develop.

One of the most beautiful and melodious of these breeding calls comes from the Southern Toad : a long, ringing trill that may be sustained for 10 seconds and answered nearly

simultaneously by several other male toads along the shoreline. A huge vocal sac or bubble pops out of the toad's throat when it calls, giving it great volume and carrying power. Toads are in a specific family of frogs characterized by warty skin and shorter hind legs — they take short hops rather than leap long distances. Their warts are actually special glands that secrete a milky poison very distasteful to predators, but which doesn't cause warts on humans. The Southern Toad is one of two true toads native to central Florida. The other one — the tiny Oak Toad — lives in the open, sandy, scrubby areas of Victoria Gardens' conservation areas and has a very high-pitched call, often compared to the peeping of a baby chick.

Look for the Southern Toad along any of the roads in Victoria Park at night when it emerges from hiding to capture insects. (Unfortunately, this is how many meet their demise — please drive carefully at night.) And listen for its

pleasant song around our ponds on warm
evenings.