

# Couch's Spadefoot

*Scaphiopus couchi*



## Identification

The Couch's spadefoot is a toad that is about 3 in/7.6 cm in length. This spadefoot toad has smooth skin that can be greenish, greenish-yellow, brownish-yellowish, or olive with irregular blotches or spots of black, brown, or dark green. The belly is white or dirty white and does not have any markings. The base of each rear foot is dark with sickle-shaped spades made from keratin, which is why they are called spadefoot. The Couch's spadefoot has large eyes compared to its size. The tadpoles are brown to black bodies with a brassy iridescent appearance.



Photo credit: [Andrew DuBois/Flickr](#)

## Observation Tips

Couch's spadefoot is found in the southwest United States south into Mexico. Spadefoot toads are hard to see, as they spend 9-10 months underground to avoid heat and desiccation. The Couch's spadefoot emerges to mate during the summer when monsoon rains create temporary ponds. The males begin calling to attract nearby females once temporary ponds appear. Their calls are said to sound like the bleating of sheep or goats. One female can lay as many as 3000 eggs, which hatch in 15 hours, and land-dwelling toadlets are active in 1-2 weeks.

## Interesting Fact

Be cautious handling Couch's spadefoot toads as they have a skin secretion that can cause allergic reactions in some people. Reactions to secretions can make cuts and scratches painful, as well as result in sneezing, running nose, and watery eyes.

## Ideal Habitat

Couch's spadefoot toads are well adapted to extremely dry conditions. They live in areas with sandy, well-drained soils, often underground or in rodent burrows. Couch's spadefoot using the spade on their hindfeet to quickly bury themselves in loose sandy soil (texture of sandy, loamy sand, or sandy loam). They inhabit arid and semi-arid shrublands, shortgrass prairie, arid grasslands, mesquite savanna, creosote shrublands, thornforest, tropical deciduous forest, cultivated lands, and desert roadways during summer thunderstorms. Adult spadefoot toads primarily feed on beetles, grasshoppers, katydids, ants, spiders, and termites. The spadefoot toad depends on ephemeral ponds for reproduction. The Couch's spadefoot toad does not breed during years of drought or insufficient rainfall.



## Management Activities that Benefit Species – Best Management Practices (BMPs)

Maintain intact arid and semi-arid grasslands, shrublands, and woodlands with ephemeral ponds and depressions that fill with water for several weeks following monsoons.

## Management Activities to Avoid

Avoid destruction of temporary ponds and surrounding native vegetation through residential development and construction of roads. Avoid other activities that reduce the number and size of ponds available for spadefoot toads for breeding. Since they rely on insects for food, avoid using insecticides near ponds to ensure that the spadefoot has adequate food.

Range map provided by International Union for Conservation of Nature

## Other Species that Benefit from Similar Habitat Management

The insects (beetles, grasshoppers, katydids, ants, spiders, and termites) that the spadefoot feeds on, as well as other species that are dependent on temporary ponds will benefit from habitat management for Couch's spadefoot toad.

## Other Resources

**AmphibiaWeb.** 2021. [Couch's spadefoot](#) University of California, Berkeley, CA

**Arizona-Sonora Desert Museum.** [Couch's spadefoot](#)

**International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN).** 2014. The IUCN Red List of Threatened Species. Version 2021-1 [Couch's spadefoot toad](#)

**Nature Serve:** 2021. NatureServe Explorer: An online encyclopedia of life [web application]. Version 7.1. NatureServe, Arlington, Virginia. [Couch's spadefoot](#)