

SUBSCRIBE | AMARILLO GLOBE NEWS



Homes Jobs Autos

Site Navigation

LOCAL NEWS...

SEARCH

GO

Home > News > Local News

Web-posted Monday, June 6, 2005

Where have all the horn toads gone?

Childress students say they're still here

By Brandi Dean
brandi.dean@amarillo.com

In the case of the disappearing horny toad, Childress High School is on the trail.

Students in Childress's advanced wildlife class won their third Hometown Horn Toad Essay Contest this year, and in the course of their research, they came to a conclusion that might surprise you.

The horny toad - aka texas horned lizard, aka horned frog, aka Phrynosoma Cornutum - is not disappearing.

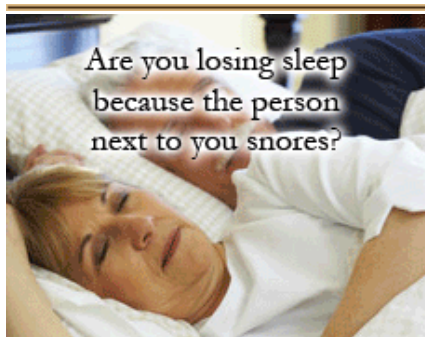
"We theorized that maybe there's not fewer horny toads," said Russell Graves, agricultural science instructor at Childress. "Maybe there's just fewer people living in the country looking for them."

People have been saying for years that they're seeing less and less of the horny toad, according to LeeAnn Linam, a biologist with the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department's wildlife diversity program. Her department heard it often enough that it started asking people to help track the reptiles through the Texas Nature Tracker programs. But, Linam said, people wanted to tell them more than just where they saw horny toads.

"We also found that people were very interested in telling us their memories of horned lizards - growing up with them and playing with them," Linam said. "They're such an interesting-looking creature, and they're generally very gentle. So a lot of people have fond memories of them."

Some of the common themes, Linam said, were dressing the lizards up or putting little harnesses on them so that they could haul matchboxes behind them. It's apparently not the kind of thing you forget, and the department realized it could use those memories to help figure out what was happening to the horny toad.

That's how the Hometown Horn Toad Essay Contest got started. For the past four years, they've asked students to help them out by interviewing older people in their hometown on their horny toad memories - how often they saw them as a child, how often they see them now, when they started seeing less of the animals and what they thought the cause was.



Still There: Childress High School students researched the horn toad and concluded that they are not disappearing, as some people think.

Courtesy Photo

ARTICLE TOOLS

[E-mail This Article](#)

[Printer-Friendly Format](#)

TALK AMARILLO

"[Dalhart Cheese Factory] Not a good move.

Population in Dalhart is around 7,500. How will that equate to return on investment from sales taxes? Money could be better invested by giving tax breaks on energy for the 160,000+ in Amarillo." - From dblwing1 [\[Join this discussion\]](#)

TOP JOBS

- **CHILD DEVELOPMENT ADVOCATE**, TMC Headstart Hereford Center. Oversees ...
- **NURSE II** Medication Clinic Adult \$35,679.82/yr. plus generous ben...
- **EXPANSION CREATES OPENINGS** \$475/Wk. If Qualified Start Immediately...
- **INDEPENDENT CONTRACTORS** w / own 24' Straight Trucks Needed. Daily rout...

[View all Top Jobs](#)

BUSINESS FINDER

Find local results by city, zip, area code or keyword

What:

Where:

[Get Your Business Listed](#)

TOP CARS

- **'04 Chevy** Tahoe, 4WD, white very clean, new tires, 67K miles, \$20,00...

[View all Top Cars](#)

The two prior advanced wildlife classes that participated at Childress concluded that increased traffic and roadway, decreased short-grass land and the use of pesticides, which killed off red harvester ants, the horny toads' favorite dinner, were to blame for the lizard's vanishing status.

But this year's class wasn't convinced. In fact, when they did their own research they were a bit confused - while all 21 of their interviewees believed they were seeing less and less of the horny toad, 71 percent said they had seen one last summer.

"If you just look around, you can see plenty of them," said Carter Wilson, one of the class members. "If they were as rare as people said they were, you wouldn't see so many."

So the students started looking at other numbers. For instance, in 1950, 40 percent of the people in Childress County lived in the country. As of the last census, that number was down to 12 percent, which means only a small part of the population lives in an area they're likely to see horny toads without looking for them.

Also, 70 percent of the interviewees, who were required to be older than 50, believed the horny toads were most common in the 1950s and 1960s - about the time they would have been spending a lot of time playing outdoors.

"They've just gotten older," Graves said. "Their priority isn't looking for horny toads anymore."

So, the students' paper summed up - and Linam agreed it was a real possibility - the number of horny toads may have decreased as the availability of red harvester ants did.

"But is the loss as substantial as some claim?" the students wrote. "We don't think so."

Questions or comments on this story?

Your comments will be sent to the **newsroom**. Submissions may be used for future publication in either The Amarillo Globe-News or on Amarillo.com.

- If the story is from the Associated Press or other national news service, we may not be able to answer your question. We can only provide further information about locally written stories.
- If you'd like a response, you must supply a valid email address.
- This form is not for sending the story to a friend, **please click** here to email this story.
- This form is for questions about the story above. If you have technical questions or are experiencing problems with the form, please **click here**.

Your Name:

Your Email:

Story **amarillo.com | Local News Where have all the horn toads gone? 06/06/05**
 Headline:

Questions
 or
 Comments:

[Send Feedback](#)

[Contact Us](#) | [Feedback](#) | [Search](#) | [Table of Contents](#) | [Privacy Policy](#)

Copyright © 2004 AMARILLO GLOBE-NEWS

