

HOMETOWN HORNED TOADS ESSAY CONTEST

A detailed black and white illustration of a horned toad, showing its characteristic horns, bumpy skin, and small eyes. It is positioned to the right of the word 'ESSAY' in the title.

**Contest Rules, Entry Form
and Guidelines for
Grades 3-5**



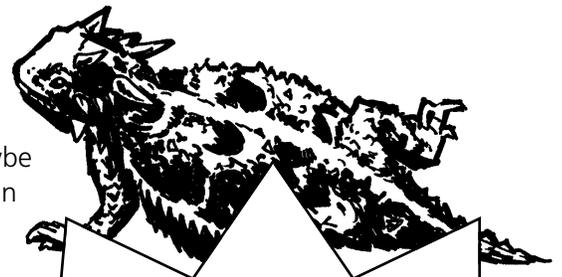
Where in the world are the horned toads?

There's a mystery in the state of Texas, and it involves our official state reptile. Some Texas Horned Lizards have come up missing, or at least that's the report we're getting from many parts of the state. We need you to do some sleuthing to help us find out why everyone's favorite lizard has pulled a disappearing act. That's the goal of Hometown Horned Toads — for you to uncover some clues and propose a hypothesis as to why the Texas Horned Lizard has become rare.

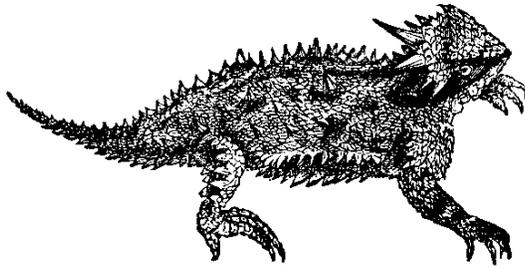
Texas Horned Lizards were once found in every Texas county except perhaps in a few counties in the southern portion of East Texas. This lizard's fierce appearance doesn't match its easy-going personality, and children all over the state grew up playing with Texas horned lizards. Wherever there were nests of big red harvester ants, you could find a horned toad happily gobbling them up. Then something changed. Texas Horned Lizards started becoming rare and even completely disappeared from some parts of the state. Even in West Texas where horned lizards can still be found, folks have reported that they are now uncommon in some areas.

What happened? There are plenty of ideas. Some folks blame red imported fire ants for preying on horned lizards or on native ants. Some folks blame the chemicals used to kill fire ants. Some folks blame growth of cities and fragmentation of habitats. Some folks blame plowing or pesticides. Maybe all these things share in the blame. The only way we can begin to unravel the mystery of the disappearing horned lizard is to try to put together all the pieces of the puzzle. We weren't gathering data on Texas Horned Lizards all those years, but average people who loved horned toads were watching the changes happen. They know when Texas Horned Lizards started to get rare. Maybe if we put that knowledge together with information about changes in habitat we can begin to understand why this popular lizard declined and how to bring it back.

That's where you come in, Texas Horned Lizard Detective. It's up to you to find folks in your community who remember horned toads and some facts about their habitat. Then it will be time for you to try to put the puzzle pieces together and see if you can find out what's happened to your **Hometown Horned Toads!**



Just ask any native Texan over the age of 40, and they can probably tell you stories of their beloved horned toads. You may want to politely inform them that their "horned toads" aren't toads at all, but a lizard in the family Phrynosomatidae, with the scientific name *Phrynosoma cornutum*. That means that our missing species has scales and lays its eggs on land. Their name is another clue to their appearance — Texas Horned Lizards have four prominent horns on the rear edge of their skull. There are 13 different species of horned lizards, all found only in North America. Texas has three species, with the Texas Horned Lizard being the most widespread and familiar one.



HOMETOWN HORNED TOADS ESSAY CONTEST

- Hometown Horned Toads is an essay contest for students in grades 3-12.
- It is designed to explore the history of Texas horned lizard abundance and perhaps decline in communities in Texas.
- Students will gather data from local sources and interview local community members to explore horned lizard abundance in their community.
- Older Texans will get a chance to tell their favorite stories about Texas horned lizards and share their knowledge about their communities with students.
- The research and essay can be completed as an individual research project or as a team project for a classroom.
- Students will practice research, writing, and critical thinking skills.

Contest Rules:

One original and two photocopies of each essay must be submitted by U.S. Mail. Each entry must be accompanied by an entry form.

All entries should be mailed to: Hometown Horned Toad Essay Contest, Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, Wildlife Diversity Program, 3000 So. IH-35, Suite 100, Austin, Texas 78704

Grades 3-5 essays:

- Must be handwritten or computer-printed, double-spaced with a font size of 12.
- Minimum length is 2 pages.
- Maximum length is 3 pages.
- A minimum of 3 people must be interviewed.
- Copies of the interview forms must be attached to each essay.

Essays will not be returned to the student. By entering the contest, the entrant grants Texas Parks and Wildlife Department permission to publish essays on the TPWD Web site or in other publications.

Judging:

Grades 3-5 essays will be judged on the basis of the following criteria:

1. Background research about horned lizards and their decline10%
2. Description of and focus on hometown study area10%
3. Number of interviews documented (with forms submitted)20%
4. Additional creativity of interviews10%
5. Writer's analysis of interview results20%
6. Organization and readability10%
7. Grammar, spelling and punctuation10%
8. Neatness10%

**For contest deadlines and prize lists, visit www.tpwd.state.tx.us/htht/
or call 1-800-792-1112, ext. 7011.**

RESEARCH GUIDELINES FOR GRADES 3-5

- 1. Find out about Texas Horned Lizards.** Start by finding out a little bit about Texas horned lizards. The following references may be useful, but you could also do searches in your library and on the Internet. Just be sure to use the proper name of the species – Texas Horned Lizard.

Texas Horned Lizard Watch Monitoring Packet by Lee Ann Linam – available for free from Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, Wildlife Diversity Program, 3000 So. IH-35, Suite 100, Austin, Texas 78704; 512-912-7011; marsha.reimer@tpwd.state.tx.us

Horned Lizards by Jane Manaster – available for sale from UT Press

Horned Lizards: Unique Reptiles of North America by Wade Sherbrook – available for sale from Southwest Parks and Monuments Association

Herps of Texas Web site:

www.zo.utexas.edu/research/txherps

Texas Parks and Wildlife Department's Web site:

<http://www.tpwd.state.tx.us/nature/wild/reptiles/thlizard.htm>;

<http://www.tpwd.state.tx.us/hornytoads>

The Horned Lizard Conservation Society Web site:

<http://homepage.psy.utexas.edu/homepage/staff/Brooks/old/HLCS>

Be sure to list all the references you used at the end of your paper. Be sure that you do not copy sentences directly from your references.

- 2. Pick a "hometown" to investigate.** You probably will pick your hometown to investigate, but you could also pick a town you could visit, such as your grandparents' hometown. Remember that even though big cities may not seem like horned lizard habitat right now, people may remember when they used to live there! Remember, your essay should focus on **one** town or county.

- 3. Find people to interview.** Locate some people who have lived in your hometown investigation area for a long time. You should try to interview as many people as possible, as different people may have different recollections.

How can you find people to interview? Start with family, friends, teachers, church members and other people that you and your family know. Try contacting Texas Parks and Wildlife biologists or game wardens, county extension agents or conservationists with the Natural Resources Conservation Service. Think of older people who have lived in the community for a long time and enjoy the outdoors, such as farmers or hunters – they're your best bet!

- 4. Prepare for the interviews.** First, learn how to conduct an oral history interview. Oral history consists of recording people's personal memories as a way of documenting history. You can learn more about oral history techniques and projects on the following Web sites:

<http://www.thc.state.tx.us> – look for a document called *Fundamentals of Oral History – Texas Preservation Guidelines*

<http://www.myhistory.org>

<http://ctl.rice.edu/projects/neh/community>

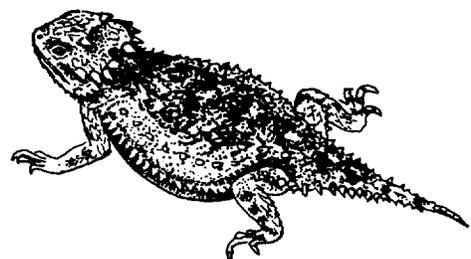
Next, prepare your interview questions. Start with the interview form on page 5, but add your own questions to make it unique.

5. **Conduct the interviews.** Use copies of the interview form on pages 5-6. After you finish with your questions allow time for the interviewee to share any other thoughts that come to mind.
6. **Think about the interviews.** Look for patterns in people’s answers about when, where, and why Texas Horned Lizards began to disappear (if they have). Using the factual information you gained, form your own opinion (your hypothesis) about when and why Texas Horned Lizards declined in your community.
7. **Report your hypotheses.** Now it’s time to write the essay. A sample outline for an essay is given below. First, tell what the people you interviewed thought about Texas Horned Lizards in your hometown. Be sure to note in your essay who you interviewed and what they said. Finally, tell us what you think. Your interviewees may tend to have one opinion about why Texas Horned Lizards declined, but you may think something different. **We want to know when and where horned lizards declined in your community, what you think caused the horned toad to disappear, and why you believe this.** Remember, horned lizards may not have declined in your community. If not, we want to know.
8. **Mail your three copies of your essay to Texas Parks and Wildlife Department.** Check our Web site (www.tpwd.state.tx.us/htht/) or phone (1-800-792-1112, ext. 7011) for entry deadlines.
9. **Share your results.** Others may be interested in what you have found out about Texas Horned Lizards. Share your essay with your school, local newspapers, County Historical Commission and nature clubs. After all, you may have just solved *“The Case of the Missing Horned Toads!”*

Sample Essay Outline

This is just a suggestion – you may want to organize your report differently.

- I. Introduction to the essay
- II. Some information about Texas Horned Lizards
- III. Some information about my “hometown” study area – what town I chose what it's like and where it’s located (be sure to tell the county)
- IV. Interview results
 - how many people I interviewed
 - when people said horned lizards were common here and what the community was like
 - when people said horned lizards started to decline and what the community was like
 - why people thought horned lizards might have declined
- V. Conclusions
 - my hypothesis about when, where and why Texas Horned Lizards became rare in my community
 - my suggestions about bringing back horned toads
- VI. List of references used
- VII. Copy of interview forms



Hometown Horned Toad Interview Form

Name of Student: _____

Name of Interviewee: _____

Interviewee phone number: _____

Date of interview: _____ **Time of interview: from** _____ **to** _____

This interview is about the following "Hometown:" _____

County of "Hometown:" _____

1. What years have you lived in this Hometown? _____
2. Do you remember seeing Texas Horned Lizards, also called horned toads, in this Hometown?
(If no, then skip to Question 12.) _____
3. When did you see horned toads in this Hometown (what years)? _____
4. What years would you say they were most common in this Hometown? _____
5. What was the community and countryside in this Hometown like when they were common?

6. Did you notice that horned toads started to become more rare in this Hometown? _____
7. If so, when was that? _____
8. What else was changing in this Hometown at that time? _____

9. Why do you think Texas Horned Lizards became more rare in this Hometown (if they did)?

10. When was the last time you saw a horned toad in this Hometown? _____
11. Do you think horned toads still live in this Hometown now? _____
12. Do you have any special memories of horned toads or anything else you would like to tell me?

(continued)

Note to Teachers

The Hometown Horned Toads Essay Contest will challenge students to investigate the history and environmental conditions of their communities over the last 50 years. It is an interdisciplinary project with students practicing research skills, using the internet, using computers and communicating both verbally and in writing. Refer to the lists below that identify Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills objectives in science and social studies that will be met as students participate in this investigation. The project can be completed as an individual assignment or teachers can assign students to work on it in cooperative learning groups. You will indicate on the entry form whether the essay you are submitting is an individual entry or a class (group) project.

TEKS Science Correlation

Grade 3

- 3.1 – Scientific processes: conducts field and laboratory investigations
- 3.2 – Scientific processes: uses scientific inquiry methods during field and laboratory investigations
- 3.3 – Scientific processes: critical thinking and scientific problems are used in making decisions
- 3.4 – Scientific processes: using a variety of tools and methods to conduct science inquiry
- 3.8 – Science concepts: living organisms need food, water, light, air, a way to dispose of waste and an environment in which to live
- 3.9 – Science concepts: species have different adaptations that help them survive

Grade 4

- 4.1 – Scientific processes: conducts field and laboratory investigations
- 4.2 – Scientific processes: uses scientific inquiry methods during field and laboratory investigations
- 4.3 – Scientific processes: critical thinking and scientific problems are used in making decisions
- 4.4 – Scientific processes: using a variety of tools and methods to conduct science inquiry
- 4.5 – Scientific concepts: identify and describe the roles of some organisms in living systems; draw conclusions about what happens when part of a system is removed
- 4.8 – Science concepts: adaptations may increase the survival of members of a species
- 4.10 – Science concepts: certain past events affect present and future events

Grade 5

- 5.1 – Scientific processes: conducts field and laboratory investigations
- 5.2 – Scientific processes: uses scientific inquiry methods during field and laboratory investigations
- 5.3 – Scientific processes: critical thinking and scientific problems are used in making decisions
- 5.4 – Scientific processes: using a variety of tools and methods to conduct science inquiry
- 5.5 – Scientific concepts: a system is a collection of cycles, structures and processes that interact
- 5.6 – Scientific concepts: some changes occur in cycles
- 5.9 – Scientific concepts: adaptations increase the survival of members of a species
- 5.11 – certain past events affect present and future events

TEKS Social Studies Correlation

Grade 3

- 4 – Geography – humans adapt to variations in the physical environment (B) how humans can modify the physical environment

Grade 4

- 5 – History – important issues, events, and individuals of the 20th century
- 9 – Geography – how people adapt to and modify their environment; consequences of human modification of the environment in Texas past and present

Grade 5

- 9 – Geography – how people adapt to and modify their environment; consequences of human modification of the environment in the United States past and present
- 24 – Science, technology, and society – impact of science and technology on life in the U.S.: analyze environmental changes brought about by scientific discoveries and technological innovations



Hometown Horned Toads Essay Contest Entry Form

(Please print or type clearly)

Name of student(s): _____

Home Address: _____ City: _____

Zip: _____ County: _____ Phone: (_____) _____

Grade: _____ School (or organization): _____

Address: _____ City: _____ Zip: _____

Teacher or sponsor's name: _____ Phone: (_____) _____

E-mail: _____

Entry Category (check one): Individual grades 3-5 Team grades 3-5

Essay Title: _____

All entries should be mailed to:
Hometown Horned Toad Essay Contest
Texas Parks and Wildlife Department
Wildlife Diversity Program
3000 So. IH-35, Suite 100
Austin, Texas 78704

Sponsored by



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4200 Smith School Road • Austin, Texas 78744
1-800-792-1112
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