

Building Habitat for Western Spadefoot Toads



These tiny three-inch toads were once found throughout California in habitats with seasonal ponds. They are named for the “spade” on their hind leg that they use to bury themselves in the water where they spend most of the year. They breed in ponds, pools, and puddles, much of which has disappeared in their natural habitat, and stay buried underground until the rainy season when enough water fills their pools. Then they emerge, breed, and start the cycle again.

Today these native amphibians are limited to only a few sites due to habitat loss and urban development. California State Parks and the Natural Communities Coalition have created a series of ponds in the backcountry to restore habitat throughout the park, increase the toad’s chances for successful breeding and to ensure a healthy population.

Exploring Approaches to Increase Ecological Value



This area of Moro Canyon, known as “The Bowl,” has a long history of land use and disturbance. Based on the soils in this area, State Parks believe that it was originally a native California grassland. Today, grasslands are one of the fastest disappearing habitats because of human impacts including development and fire. Starting in the late 1800s, The Bowl was tilled for farming and used for cattle and sheep grazing. Black mustard, artichoke thistle, and other invasive plants benefitted from this disturbance by taking over the area and out-competing the native grasses and shrubs. This reduced the biodiversity and resilience of the local plant community by taking food and shelter away from wildlife.

Today, Crystal Cove State Park has partnered with UC Irvine scientists and Crystal Cove Conservancy educators to identify the most cost-effective way to restore grassland and coastal sage scrub plant communities in disturbed areas like The Bowl.

To read more about these projects and others see [Park Info/Natural Resources Management](#) on the home page.