



## Memories of Horned Lizards in Comal County

By Sarah Petta

1st Place Winner - Grade 3-5

Hometown Horned Toads Essay Contest 2002

I have never seen a horny toad, but the people I've interviewed have very fond memories of this little reptile. The horned lizard, also known as the horny toad, is special because it used to be just a play toy to the kids who lived in Texas until the early 1970's. The Texas horned lizard is Texas Christian University's mascot and the Texas state reptile; this shows how much Texans love this little reptile. Everyone loves the horned lizard so much that I had no trouble finding interviewees.

The horned lizard has some unique defenses. The people who I talked to told me that horned toads can spit, puff up, and shoot blood out of the corner of their eyes because you can make them mad easily. They can look mean when they puff up, but they are not dangerous. Most people remembered them as cute, gentle and playful reptiles that were plentiful a long time ago.

The color of the Texas horned lizard helps it hide from predators. The Texas horned lizard has two dark stripes radiating from the eyes and horns on the back of its head. Its horns are longer than the horns on the other two species which live in Texas. The other two species are the round-tailed and the short-horned lizards. All three types of horned liz-

ards are protected by law, but the Texas horned lizard is struggling to survive the most.

According to all my interviewees, the horned lizard was plentiful in New Braunfels in the 1940s until the early 1970s. They all blamed the rareness of the horned lizard on the fire ants. New Braunfels, which is in Comal County, was smaller then, only about 15,000 in population. It was more of a country town then. The kids were freer to roam because it was such a small town.

Mrs. Rosalea House moved to New Braunfels in 1948. Mr. Locke had a nursery with alligators and would buy horned toads from the kids for 50 cents a piece to feed to his alligators. Ms. House jokingly said that she thinks he may be responsible for the rareness of the horny toad. Her real opinion of what is making the horny toad disappear is the fire ants. Mrs. House's husband caught a horny and gave it to a German musician, who was visiting New Braunfels for Wurstfest.

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### Upcoming Events

#### 3rd Horned Toad Round-Up & Chili Cook-Off

Rankin, Texas

Saturday, February 1, 2003

contact Bill Brooks (bgbrooks@mail.utexas.edu)

#### 75th OLD RIP Commemoration

Eastland County Courthouse Lobby

February 24, 2003 at noon

contact Bette & Jim Armstrong ([jimbett@eastland.net](mailto:jimbett@eastland.net))

#### Texas Parks and Wildlife

Hometown Horned Toads Essay Contest

submission deadline March 1, 2003

[www.tpwd.state.tx.us/htht](http://www.tpwd.state.tx.us/htht)

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## *Phrynosomatics* Editor

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The musician took the horny toad back to Germany. He wrote back and told them it was “like a revelation” in Germany, because Germans had never seen anything like a horned lizard.

Mrs. Edith Winkler remembers seeing horny toads just hopping around her yard. She had three sons who would always stick the horny toads they caught in her dresser drawers. She lived here in the 1950’s. She left in 1958 and returned to New Braunfels in 1978 and she didn’t see any more horned toads.

Dr. Fred Willard and Mrs. Colleen Willard have lived in New Braunfels for 37 years. They have never seen a horned toad in this community, but remember them from their childhood. Dr. Willard is a local dentist who remembers turning horny toads on their backs, rubbing their bellies, and hypnotizing them to sleep. When he turned them right side up they would get mad and puff up. He used to make tie tacks by casting baby horned toads in gold. He did this because they took horned toads for granted, thinking that they would always be three.

Mrs. Colleen Willard remembers playing with horned lizards in her childhood.

She would keep them in a box for a couple of days. She kept them alive by feeding them harvester ants. Their tummies were white and scaly looking and their droppings had dried ant skeletons in them. She grew up in Sanderson in the 1940’s.

Mr. Robert Pendleton, a New Braunfels postman, last saw a horned lizard in 2000 while on his route in the country. “It looked healthy,” he told me. “But it didn’t have a mate that I could see.” He watched for about ten minutes before he went on.

If we want horned lizards in our state we need to kill the fire ants. The fire ants have been eating everything, including new born baby ani-

mals. And because of the fire ants the harvester ants are being pushed out. Fire ants may be part of the reason the horny toads are rare, but everyone’s favorite memory of horned toads is catching them and keeping them. Catching horned toads and keeping them in captivity may weaken them because they don’t have enough ants to eat. If they are set free later they may die because they are not strong enough. I want the horned toad in our state. It was a really neat reptile because everyone played with it and it was important to our ecological system.

#### Interview Questions

1. How long have you lived in our community?
2. Have you ever had an encounter with a horny toad?
3. Was it in this community?
4. When did you notice horned toads disappearance?

5. Do you have any special memories of that encounter?
6. Do you want horned toads in our community?
7. Are horned toads important? In what way? \_
8. Do you think horned toads are becoming rare?
9. What do you think is causing their rareness?
10. Do you think horned toads still live in this community? If so, where in the community?
11. What was New Braunfels like when horned toads lived here-if they did?
12. When the community changed did the appearance of horned toads change, too?
13. Do you think horned toads may become extinct?
14. Can you give me some habitat and other facts about horned toads? Do you know how or where I can look for horned toads?



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*Dig this:  
We live here too!*

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# Results from the 2002 Texas Parks and Wildlife's Hometown Horned Toads Essay Contest

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*The following is a condensed version of the essay results report provided by TPWD. For information on the 2002-2003 essay contest, see Texas Events and News on page 7.*

The Texas horned lizard (*Phrynosoma cornutum*) is a Texas icon and the official state reptile of Texas. Many Texas adults can recount fond memories of playing with the ubiquitous reptiles in their childhood neighborhoods; however over the last 30 years "horny toads" have become increasingly rare in the state. There are many theories regarding the cause of the decline, with many Texans able to recall the time period when they believe that horned lizards became rare in their communities. In 2001-02 Texas Parks and Wildlife, along with several co-operators, launched the Hometown Horned Toads Essay Contest, with the specific purpose of collecting and analyzing personal recollections of Texas horned lizard (THL) abundance and decline. The goals of the contest where:

- to collect anecdotal historical accounts of THL decline
- to compare declines with concurrent social and environmental change
- to familiarize students with THL
- to teach students oral history and non-traditional research techniques
- to let people "tell their stories" of THL

Essays were invited in both team and individual categories for three age groups: grades 3-5, grades 4-6, and grades 9-12. A total of 223 essays were received from students

in 44 different counties, while providing interviews from over 500 people in 48 different counties. The participation breakdown was:

Grade	Individual	Team
3-5	176 entries	9 entries
6-8	27 entries	4 entries
9-12	5 entries	2 entries

In addition to the essay contest, adults were invited to submit their remembrances of THL to the TPWD website. About 90 adults from 52 counties submitted THL recollections and although they contained interesting stories, lack of standardization resulted in a great deal of variance in the type of data received.

For their essays, students were expected to interview long-term residents of their area, either a community or county, and use the interview results to determine if a decline in the THL had taken place. If a decline had taken place, the students were encouraged to suggest a time period when the decline had begun and propose a hypothesis for the decline. Only 94 essays provided all the requested information and 142 essays suggested a decline hypothesis.

The essays provided data from across the state with the overall consensus in nearly every county that the horned lizard had declined. While the interviewees in the eastern part of the state were unanimous in their consensus on decline, the interviewees in the South and West Texas had more mixed responses. Also, a few interviewees indicated that they did not think horned lizards had declined.

The reported dates of decline range from the 1950s through the

2000s, sometimes with a wide range within a single county. The 1970s (36%) and 1980s (33%) were the most frequently reported decades of decline. Although earlier dates of decline might be expected in the eastern part of the state, the overall pattern is not apparent in the essay results.

Within each county there were often several suggested causes for the decline of the THL populations. The most common suggestion was the red imported fire ant (48% of essays), followed by urbanization or human population growth (44%), and pesticides (29%). An additional 18 essays (12%) suggested ant pesticides in particular played a role.

The Hometown Horned Toads Essay Contest, TPWD's first effort to collect data through the use of oral histories, can be judged a success from several perspectives. Participation was excellent with over 200 essays received; however participation amount high school age students was disappointing despite efforts to reach high school science teachers at conferences.

The elementary school age essays were especially likely to fall short of the objectives, with many of the focusing on the THL biology and many of the interviews focusing on interesting or amusing stories. In the future, students should be provided with a standardized interview form with space for additional questions at the bottom. If students are required to submit the completed forms, then TPWD will have the option of independently analyzing the interviewee response. Students

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# Hard Times for Horny Toads

By Levi Posey

2nd Place Winner - Grade 3-5

Hometown Horned Toads Essay Contest 2002

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Hello, I am Horny the horned toad. May I tell you a little about myself? I am not really a toad. I am a lizard, which makes me a reptile. I was hatched from an egg about seven years ago. I am old for a horned toad. I like to sleep all winter when it is cold because I am cold blooded. I have to lie in the sun to get warm because I cannot produce my own body heat. When I go to sleep in the winter, it is called hibernation. This may sound lazy, but I would die in the cold. My favorite food is ants. I will also eat spiders, beetles, and grasshoppers. I like to lie in the middle of the ant beds that I find, and as they come running up to get me, I eat them up. When I am sunning, if it gets too hot, I move to the shade where it is a little cooler. My favorite time of day is in the morning. It is not too hot and not too cold. I like it when it is dry, but not so dry that there is no water anywhere. I like it when there is only sparse plant cover. These are my favorite conditions.

One day while I was sunning, a boy came and tried to catch me. I ran a short distance then I froze. My skin is camouflaged so I knew it would hide me. But he saw me and kept coming. I stayed still hoping he would leave, but he ran up and picked me up. That really scared me, so I squirted some blood out of my eyes. That is a good trick my granddad taught me to use when nothing else works. Turned out that he wanted to make friends with me.

Now he is trying to help me find out what happened to Texas Horned Lizards. He has interviewed a lot of elderly people while trying to find out what happened to my relatives.

Mr. Hull thinks that loss of plant cover to hide us from things that like horned toads for dinner is the problem. Mr. Cleveland thinks that ant poisons are killing all of our food and starving us to death. Mrs. Collins also thinks insecticides are killing us. Mrs. Warren agrees that people are poisoning all our food and that we are starving. Mr. Posey says that he has seen a lot of horned toads that have been run over by cars. All of these people remember playing with my ancestors when they were children and horned toads were everywhere. They told us some pretty strange stories about playing with horned toads, games I had never thought of. They all miss seeing the horned toads, and say they have noticed the biggest decrease in horned toads in the last five years.

After doing all this research my friend has some ideas. He noticed that the eastern part of Texas, where horned toads are almost never seen, there are a whole lot of fire ants. Fire ants kill harvester ants and in doing so, kill the favorite food of horned toads. He also says that since there has been a drought in the last seven years, dryness may have caused horned toad eggs not to hatch. Eggs have to have a certain humidity and temperature to develop. The heat and dryness may have killed the embryo while still in the egg. Also, winter farming may be causing us to be plowed up while we are hibernating. That would cause us to be crushed by the plow or die in the cold. Or it is possible that predators are eating us and eating all our eggs because food is scarce in dry times. He is also convinced that those poi-

sons people use on the insects either kill us too or starve us to death. It is probably not just one or two things causing the decrease in our population, but many things put together.

This is not a good time to be a horny toad. It is hard times for us all. It has been a long time since I saw any of my relatives. I sure wish we could have a family reunion. Or is all my family dead? That is why my friend is researching for me. He says that a lot of other people are trying to find out too. He even found out that some people started to see more horned toads again in the last couple of years and that maybe people are figuring out how to save us. I sure hope they figure out what has happened to all my family and I am mighty grateful for their help to preserve the Texas State Reptile.

## Interview Questions

1. What is your earliest memory of a horned toad?
2. What was your first impression of a horned toad? Did they scare you?
3. Have you ever noticed that there are fewer horned toads than when you were younger?
4. When was it that you first noticed a decrease in horned toad population?
5. What do you think contributed to the decrease in horned toad population?
6. What years have you lived in this community?
7. What years did you see the most horned toads?
8. How common were they in the 50s, 60s, 70s, and 80s?

*continued on page 8*

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# Kenedy, Old Rip Festival, and Texas Wildlife Expo

by Bill Brooks

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## **HORNED TOAD FUN days at Kenedy Aug. 31, 2002.**

What a great festival the Horned Toad Club put on this Saturday! Horny toad lovers filled the Karnes County Youth Show Barn for this day. The HLCS had our booth manned by John and Cheryl Franks,

laugh riot, too.

We are fascinated with Kenedy's idea of creating a horned toad mosaic out of buttons. My mom donated a bag of buttons which I took down for her. The HTC may need as many as 45,000 buttons for this project so your donations are still being gratefully accepted.



Carolyn Todd, Clare Freeman, Ruthann Panipinto, Jana Morse, Bette and Jim Armstrong and Bill Brooks. We all had a blast.

The hall was full of other booths with arts and crafts of all kinds.

The preplanned contests and events were numerous and fast paced. We enjoyed the country western music and laughed out loud at the kid's "horned toad crunch" cookie eating contest, the "red ant relay" (collecting red ants in a spoon and transporting them to the end of the track), the "red ant munch" (the kids separated out red pieces of cereal from a bowl without the use of their hands), and the horned toad toss (tossing a 22 lb concrete "horned toad"). The stick horse rodeo was a

HLCS member Bette Armstrong gave a presentation on Old Rip and the festival in Eastland. John Leleux gave an interesting talk on the Texas Tortoise. Bill Brooks of the HLCS gave a slide show and talk on Horned Lizards.

Through out the day HLCS members lead horned lizard surveys into the surrounding areas. We surveyed four different sites and 13 horny toads were found and their stats were taken before being released, for the TPWD's Horned Lizard Watch Program.

Folks from all over central Texas came to this fun event. There was a nice group of people who drove in from San Antonio for the day. The officers of the Horned Toad Club,

Wade Phelps, Donnie Reagan, Bertha Thomas, and Janell Swango as well as all the members of the Horny Toad Club deserve to be congratulated for this wonderful day of fun, outreach and education. Special thanks should go out to driving force, Carter Snooks and all the fine people who supported this event in the Horned Toad Capital of the World. We look forward to returning.

## **Old Rip Festival in Eastland, TX September 21st, 2002**

Who would have thought that in 2002, 74 years after Eugene Day plucked Old Rip from the cornerstone of the Eastland county courthouse, we would still be celebrating the event?

It's always a fine celebration, too. Wrapped around the courthouse in the center of Eastland's town square, is all manner and make of booths selling anything from black iron signs, to wooden boxes, to sausage on a stick to hermit crabs. This wonderful celebration also offers a parade, singers, a car show and a small carnival.

Jim and Bette Armstrong, HLCS members who live in Eastland, always show us a good time. This year's booth turned into a family affair with member Joyce Roach bringing along her mother and grandson. Bill Brooks also drove up from Austin.

The weather was warm but not too warm. The crowds were thick but friendly. The early morning fun run was enjoyed by many and the crowd-pleasing horned toad derby took place with only a few wrecks and run-a-ways. I'm sure if the most

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# Events and News

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## National

Membership renewal is December 31, 2002.

Jane Manaster's book, *Horned Lizards*, is now available in a revised paperback edition from the Texas Tech University Press. Manaster, a freelance writer and historian, lives in Austin, Texas. [www.ttup.ttu.edu/books/hornedlizards.html](http://www.ttup.ttu.edu/books/hornedlizards.html)  
ISBN 0-89672-495-6

Wade Sherbrooke's new book, *Introduction to Horned Lizards of North America*, will be available in March 2003 from the University of California Press. Sherbrooke is Director, Southwestern Research Station, American Museum of Natural History.

[www.ucpress.edu/books/pages/9297.html](http://www.ucpress.edu/books/pages/9297.html)

Clothbound: ISBN 0-520-22825-1

Paperback: ISBN 0-520-22827-8

## Texas

Texas Parks and Wildlife 2002-2003 Hometown Horned Toads Essay Contest  
Entries due March 1, 2003.  
For more info contact the Texas Horned Lizard Watch, Wildlife Diversity Branch  
1-800-792-1112 ext 7011  
[www.tpwd.state.tx.us/htht](http://www.tpwd.state.tx.us/htht)

For the second year the Parks Department gave us a double booth in the International Tent and again, we filled our space with exhibits, literature, sales goods and children's activities. Our horned lizard masks were a big hit. Kids with horny toad faces were spotted all over the expo and many folks (including a lot of teachers) hunted down our booth to get their mask and other horned toad handouts.

This show is a long two-day volunteer commitment for our members. We wish to thank everyone who put in all or part of either day at this year's EXPO.

Saturday:

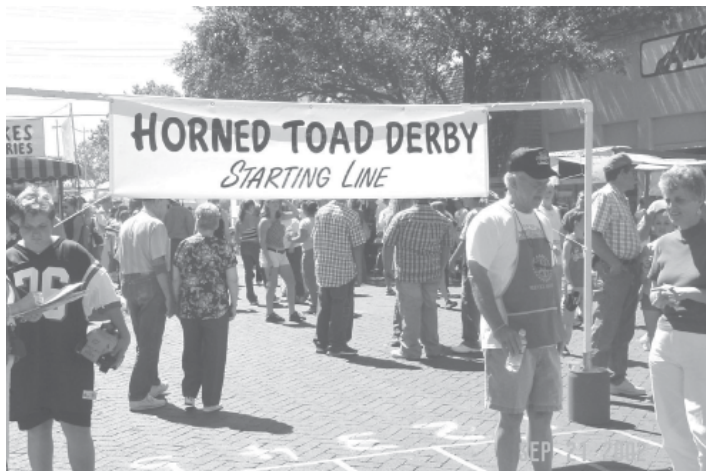
Lee Ann Linam  
Debbie Cobb & Todd Osborne  
Ruthann Panipinto  
Clare Freeman  
Carolyn Todd  
Tom and Kathy Smith  
Bill Brooks

Sunday:

Bill Davis  
Ruthann Panipinto  
Toni and Reed Hayes  
Tom and Elaine Adams  
Bill Brooks

We would also like to thank Austin's arm of the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department for allowing us to participate in the Texas Wildlife Expo. We look forward to EXPO 2003!

Photo far left - horned lizards in Kenedy, TX  
Photo left - Old Rip Festival  
photos by Jim Armstrong



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famous horned lizard in the world, Old Rip, had been looking down on us all, he would have been pleased.

## TEXAS WILDLIFE EXPO 2002

On October 5 & 6, 2002 the Texas Chapter of the HLCS took its place among 203 other exhibitors to spread our message of Horned Lizard conservation to over 40,000 visitors. This once a year Texas Parks and Wildlife sponsored event is far and away our largest outreach project of the year.

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# Announcing the HLCS Bumper Sticker Design Contest

by Bill Brooks

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Back in 1990 when the society was new, the Texas Chapter designed yellow bumper sticker. (See a picture on the lower right corner of the HLCS Product Order Form.) It says, "HORNY TOADS KEEP 'EM OFF THE LIST, Protected State Reptile - Texas Native"

We are about to sell out of our bumper sticker supply and I think it's time for a new design. I'd like to see what our members can do.

Requirements: (Actually, these are

more guidelines rather than strict requirements.)

1) We will probably want to include our logo, title and address (much like what appears on the upper left corner of the newsletter) somewhere on the bumper sticker.

2) We would like it a little more generic, that is, we want a design that will apply to all horned lizards, not just the Texas Horned Lizard.

3) I thought a clever saying, something that will stick in your head,

would be nice. Much like "I brake for horned lizards" but PLEASE!!! Not That One!

So, think about it folks. Send your entries to: HLCS, P.O. Box 122, Austin, TX 78767. Deadline: Jan 1, 2003.

In case two entries submit the same design, the one with the earliest postmark wins. Prize: A HLCS t-shirt of your choice. All design submissions become the property of the Texas Chapter of the HLCS Society.

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should continue to be encouraged to analyze results within their essay, as it provides a good learning experience, and if done well, can provide excellent summary statistics for TPWD's use.

Many older students (with the exception of a few of the winning essays) failed to access outside sources of data to corroborate or reject hypotheses about THL decline. For this reason the contest did not achieve its objective or correlating anecdotal accounts of decline with causal factors in the community. The participant guideline provide several suggested websites and other sources of data to examine such correlations. Perhaps future participant materials could more carefully guide the students through the hypothesis procedure. In addition, care should be taken to not imply that the essays must conclude that a decline has taken place. Some essays from South and West Texas seemed to try to explain a decline, when many interviewees indicated that THL were still common.

Despite these areas of improvements, many goals of for the contest where met. First, students learned a lot about a native Texas reptile. Students seemed fascinated with the adaptations and biology of the species, especially the blood squirting ability. With nearly all essays providing some evidence of interviews conducted, students also gain skills at interviewing and gathering oral histories.

Secondly, perhaps more importantly, the contest seemed to develop an appreciation for the species among the students. Several noted that the THL were an important part of the ecological balance. Many indicated that they hoped that Texas horned lizards could be preserved for the future, noting that "if we work together we can save them from extinction".

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9. What was the community and surrounding area like when horned toads were the most common? Was there more land in pasture back then?

10. At what time did you notice a decrease in the horned toad population?

11. What else was changing in the community at that time? Do you remember when more people started using cab tractors and plowing more in the winter?

12. When was the last time you saw a horned toad?

13. Is there anything else that you would like to tell me about a horned toad?

14. Do you have any stories from when you were little about playing with horny toads?



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*HLCS would like to thank the following members and businesses for their support.*

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**HLCS depends on its membership for its conservation and educational  
presence in the community.**

Categories for annual memberships include:

\$25 Regular  
\$10 Student or Senior  
\$25 Family + \$10 Additional Member  
\$50 Contributing  
\$250 Corporate  
or  
\$300 for a Lifetime membership.

The HLCS welcomes contributions in any amount you wish to submit and is a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization.

# WANTED! - Newsletter submissions

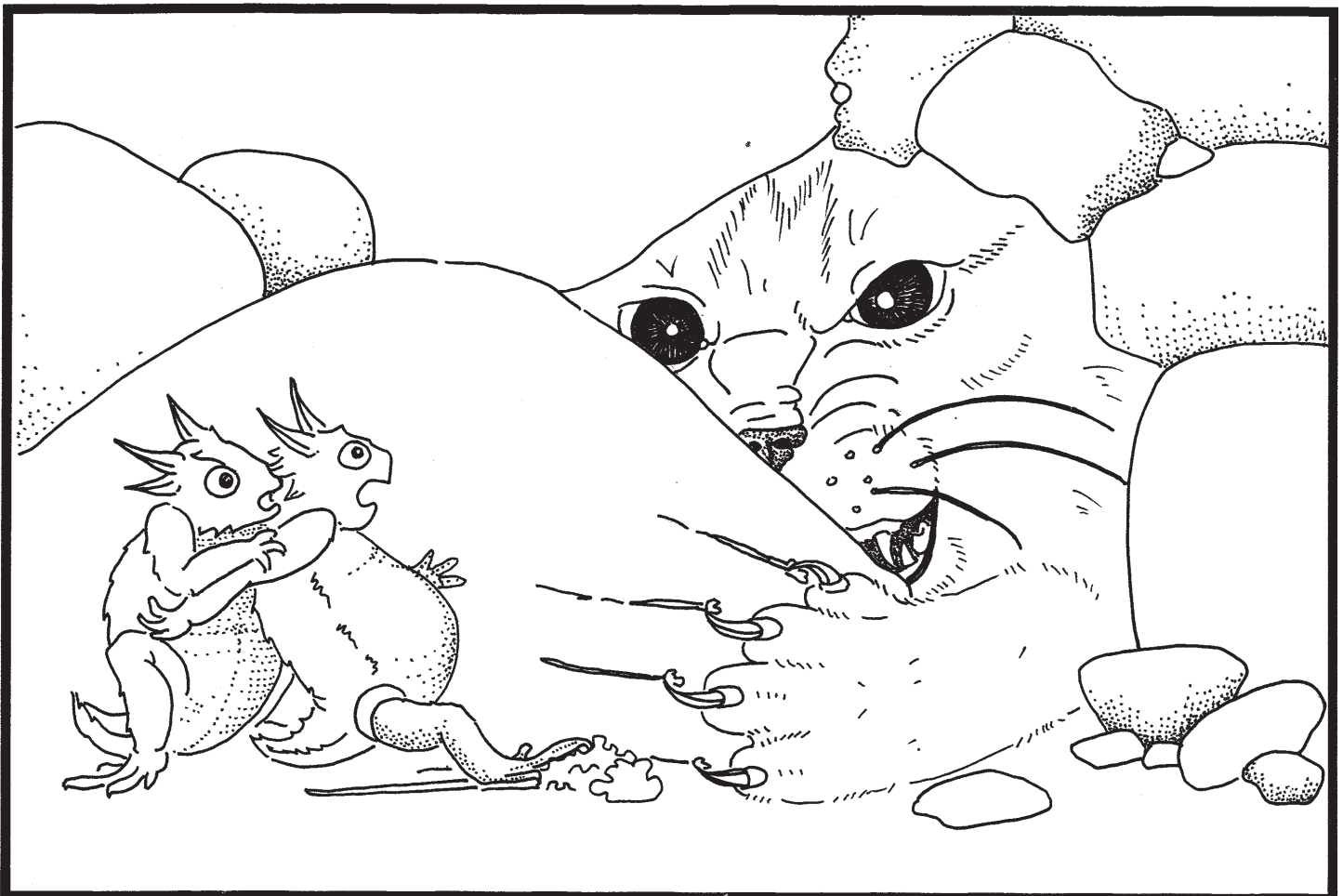
We are looking for newsletter submissions. Please send articles, letters, news, pictures, artwork, and upcoming event notifications.

The newsletter is published in March, June, September and December. Submission deadline is the 2nd week of February, May, August, and November, for inclusion in the following issue.

Items can be submitted via email to [messec@hornedlizards.org](mailto:messec@hornedlizards.org) or by regular mail to the editor's address listed on page 2.

**HAYWIRE**

by M. Hawley



“I DON'T WANT TO BE PART OF 'FLUFFY'S' NEXT HAIRBALL!”

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**Don't Forget to Renew-Consider giving a gift membership to the Phrynophiles in your family!**  
**PLEASE JOIN US NOW!** Students/Seniors: \$10, Regular: \$25, Contributing: \$50, Corporate: \$250, Lifetime: \$300.  
 (Families=\$25 for the first person and \$10 for each additional member).  
 HLCS is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization. Contributions are deductible to the extent allowable by law.

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