

I don't know if the unusually high water and flooding this past spring changed some amphibian patterns, but I have twice seen Western Painted Turtles trying to cross the four lane Gordon Drive by the Thompson Marsh. One was unsuccessful and the second was helped across by my partner as we were cycling along this stretch of road. Their striking yellow stripes along their appendages and the gorgeous red and yellow detailing on their underbelly, called the plastron, would impress Fabergé (artist of bejeweled and painted eggs). The carapace or upper part of its shell is dark green, no doubt to fit into its pond environment. It is the only native pond turtle in B.C..

A Western Painted Turtle's mating habits are amusing. When a female turtle gives the 'okay' by swimming quickly across a pond, several males will race to catch up and the first male to reach her will face her and even pat her head with its front claws. With a twinkle in their eyes, they sink to the bottom of the pond to mate. If the female is in the mood but doesn't get a reaction from a male, she might just chase after one herself – no point in just being a wall flower.



Photo © Jeremie Hollman

With the grasslands and talus slopes of Black Mountain, it is not surprising that there are a few snakes living here. Although I've not seen the large Gopher Snake, one was spotted by a couple members of our board. This snake is similar to a Western Rattler with the same body bulk and distinctive markings but does not have the large triangular head of its poisonous cousin and of course, not its tail rattle. Its head is small and sports a black line from its jaw to its eyes and across the head. It is the longest snake in B.C. reaching from 1 to 2 metres in length. It

is not venomous, but pretends to be by waving its tail in the dry grasses when threatened, giving off a rattling sound like a rattle snake. In case that doesn't scare you off it can also hiss and snort like a bull, hence another common name for the snake – Bull Snake. Although they primarily eat rodents they are known to eat insects, lizards, birds and their eggs. How do they get to the bird nests, you ask? They can climb trees!



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Let's put that thought out of our minds and move on to the Great Basin Spadefoot Toad. This little hopper, uniquely designed to survive in dry grasslands habitat beside ephemeral ponds, has been heard (a low pitched clacking) in one area of Black Mountain. Ephemeral ponds are those that dry up mid-summer and so are not conducive to most amphibians. It gets its name from the long, spade shaped, digging foot it has on the end of each leg, to burrow into loose soil in the hot weather or to hibernate. A gelatinous gel also helps protect it from the heat. These hardy little toads can stand water temperatures up to 34 degrees Celsius. If pond waters evaporate early, Spadefoots have been known to clamour out of the pond in a desperate attempt to get into a burrow even eating others of their kind who might be in their way. Another hazard they have to face are deep cattle footprints at the water's edge in which the little toads can fall into and then not be able to climb out. With a donation from the Central Okanagan Naturalists' Society, fencing around the one ephemeral pond will help protect these little toads.



The more you learn about the different reptiles and amphibians, the more you respect their uniqueness and vulnerability. Humans are far more of a threat to them than they are to us.

All of the facts in this article were taken from the B.C. Ministry of the Environment, *Wildlife Atlas of Species at Risk* and can be accessed by going to:

<http://www.env.gov.bc.ca/okanagan/esd/atlas/list.html>

Image of Gopher Snake:

<http://www.californiaherps.com/snakes/images/pccateniferch2.jpg>

Image of Spadefoot Toad

<http://whatdoanimalseat.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/03/This-picture-is-showing-Spadefoot-toads-look-like-4.jpg>

Image of Western Skink by Dr. Gavin Hanke of the Royal BC Museum

[https://www.google.ca/url?sa=i&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=images&cd=&cad=rja&uact=8&ved=0ahUKEwjByNqty9fVAhUMwWMKhf5ACKUQiRwlBw&url=http%3A%2F%2Fstaff.royalbcmuseum.bc.ca%2F2015%2F06%2F25%2Fthink-skinks%2F&psig=AFQjCNFt-4IU7MfEliO2br\\_4\\_d2i3YBICQ&ust=1502829773160720](https://www.google.ca/url?sa=i&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=images&cd=&cad=rja&uact=8&ved=0ahUKEwjByNqty9fVAhUMwWMKhf5ACKUQiRwlBw&url=http%3A%2F%2Fstaff.royalbcmuseum.bc.ca%2F2015%2F06%2F25%2Fthink-skinks%2F&psig=AFQjCNFt-4IU7MfEliO2br_4_d2i3YBICQ&ust=1502829773160720)

Image of Western Turtle

<http://northcolumbia.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/PaintedTurtle.jpg>