All Montana Reptiles and Amphibians

found in
Conservation District: Ruby Valley Conservation District

Common Gartersnake
Thamnophis sirtalis

Native Species
Global Rank: G5
State Rank: S4

Agency Status
USFWS:
USFS:
BLM:

General Description

Adult Common Gartersnakes range from 16 to 42 inches in length. This snake has two color variations in Montana. The first has three yellow longitudinal stripes (one dorsal and two lateral) and a black stripe broken by red spots between the yellow stripes. The lateral stripes are located on the second and third scale rows above the belly scales. The second color variation has the same striping pattern but lacks the red dots. In both variations, the background color between stripes is black to dark olive. The belly color ranges from yellow to bluish, and some individuals of the red-sided color variation have small black spots on the edge of the belly scales. The dorsal scales are keeled, and normally there are seven scales on the upper lip. Coloration varies geographically. There are 19 dorsal scale rows at mid-body and lateral stripes on the 2nd and 3rd scale rows (also on row 4 in subspecies annectens). There are 7 upper labials, 1 preocular, and 3 postoculars. The scales are keeled, and the anal undivided. The total length of adults is usually 41 to 66 centimeters (up to 131 centimeters). Common Gartersnakes are around 12 to 23 centimeters at birth (Smith and Brodie 1982 and Conant and Collins 1991).

Habitat

Common Gartersnakes are found in nearly all habitats, but most commonly at lower elevations around water. Females give birth to 6 to 18 live young during summer. They eat a variety of vertebrates and invertebrates. They prefer moist habitats and are found most often along the borders of streams, ponds and lakes (Brunson and Demaree 1951, Franz 1971, and Anderson 1977). They may travel long distances (4 to 17 kilometers) from hibernacula to forage in preferred habitat (Gregory and Stewart 1975).
General Description

A slender, moderately long snake, the North American Racer ranges from 20 to 65 inches in length. In adults, color of the back can vary from uniform greenish gray to brown or blue. The belly is whitish to pale yellow, the latter extending onto scales of the upper lips and nasal region of the head. The eyes are relatively large, and the scales are smooth. Young snakes (up to about 20 inches) have a much different coloration than adults. On the back, a series of brown blotches edged with black runs the length of the snake; a row of blotches on each side also extends onto the belly.

Habitat

North American Racers are associated with relatively open habitats either in shortgrass prairie or forested areas. Very fast and active, they prey on insects and small vertebrates such as mice and frogs. Females lay a clutch of three to seven eggs in summer. In WY, primary habitats are scarp woodlands of plains and foothills often near water (Baxter and Stone 1980). Some cover seems especially important on shortgrass prairie (Fitch 1963). In the NW, North American Racers generally absent from dense forest/high mountains (Nussbaum et al. 1983)
General Description

This snake looks and feels like rubber, hence its name. It is a small, shiny, stout snake (12 to 28 inches) with very small eyes and a blunt tail. The scales are small and smooth, except for those on the head, which are enlarged. Dorsum of adult is plain brown to olive green, venter is cream to yellow, sometimes with dark flecks or brown, orange, or black mottling; young are pinkish to tan above, light yellow to pink below. Top of head is covered with large symmetrical plates; pupil is vertically oval. Males and some females have a spur on each side in the anal region. Total length of adults usually is 35 to 83 cm (Stebbins 1985).

Habitat

Rubber Boas are secretive, slow-moving, docile snakes, usually found under logs and rocks in either moist or dry forest habitats. They are primarily nocturnal, but occasionally may be observed sunning on roads, trails, or in open areas. They feed primarily on small mice but also take shrews, salamanders, snakes, and lizards. Two to eight young are born alive in late summer or early fall. In Mission Mountains, were usually found in large talus slides or under logs/rocks near slides (Brunson and Demaree 1951) or in leaf-litter in deep shaded Douglas-fir/cedar forest (Franz 1971). Often found in areas with many flat rocks and near water (Baxter and Stone 1980).
**Painted Turtle**  
*Chrysemys picta*

**Native Species**  
Global Rank: G5  
State Rank: S4

**Agency Status**  
USFWS:  
USFS:  
BLM:

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### General Description

The upper shell is olive to black, with the edges of shields (plates making up the shell) bordered with yellow. The head, neck, and legs are marked with yellow lines, and a red spot appears behind the eye. The lower shell is brightly colored with red and yellow. Females may reach 9 inches in upper shell length, but males seldom reach 7 inches. Males have much longer front claws than females, and the vent is situated farther from the edge of the shell.

### Habitat

Painted Turtles are found in lakes, ponds, reservoirs, and sloughs that contain some shallow water areas and a soft bottom; also river backwaters and oxbows with little current. They often use logs and rocks for basking. Painted Turtles hibernate in bottom mud from early October to mid- or late April. They reproduce at 4 to 8 years of age, depending on climate (later in northern latitudes). Six to 20 leathery eggs are laid in nests excavated in gravel or sand. Food items include aquatic vegetation, frogs, tadpoles, small fish, and a variety of invertebrates. Found in wide variety of waterbodies, including glacial lakes (Franz 1971); but not found in oligotrophic mountain lakes above 3363 ft. in Mission Mountains (Brunson and Demaree 1951). Nest on south-facing grassy slopes in southern Canada (MacCracken et al. 1983).
Prairie Rattlesnake  
Crotalus viridis

**General Description**

Adults have a triangular head, blunt nose, narrow neck, and stout body; they range in length from 15 to 60 inches. The background color above varies from pale green to brown; a series of brown or black blotches edged with a dark and then a light line extends the length of the body. The blotches often merge into rings on the tail. There are also blotches on the sides. The belly is pale yellow to white and lacks blotches. All rattlesnakes have a heat-sensing pit located between the nostril and the eye. The fangs are hollow and hinged, allowing them to be folded back against the roof of the mouth. The tail ends in a rattle that helps warn potential predators of the snake's presence.

**Habitat**

Prairie Rattlesnakes favor open and arid country but are also found in ponderosa pine stands and mixed grass-coniferous forests. They are more likely to be encountered on south-facing slopes and in areas with rock outcrops. Prairie Rattlesnakes den communally, but range up to 7 miles from the dens during the summer. Females give birth to 4 to 21 young in late summer; the young are marked similarly to adults, but colors are brighter. Prairie Rattlesnakes prey on a variety of animals, including mice, ground squirrels, and rabbits. Gravid females may aggregate at basking sites (rookeries) (Gannon and Secoy 1985). May be most common near broken country and breaks. Land use changes from range to irrigated farmland may adversely affect population (Pendlebury 1977).
Terrestrial Gartersnake  
*Thamnophis elegans*

**Native Species**
- **Global Rank:** G5
- **State Rank:** S5

**Agency Status**
- USFWS:
- USFS:
- BLM:

**General Description**
Adults vary from 16 to 43 inches in length. This snake is distinguished by three yellow stripes (one dorsal, two lateral) running the length of the body and a series of black spots situated between, and somewhat on, the stripes. The background color between the stripes is brownish or greenish. All-black individuals are occasionally found. A series of dark black/brown blotches covers most of the belly. There are normally eight scales on the upper lip.

**Habitat**
Terrestrial Gartersnakes are found in nearly all habitats, but most commonly at lower elevations around water. Females give birth to 6 to 18 live young during summer. They eat a variety of vertebrates and invertebrates. Common near water but also found away from water. At high elevations common on rocky cliffs and brushy talus (Brunson and Demaree 1951 and Franz 1971). On prairie may be more common along brushy bottomland (Mosimann and Rabb 1952 and Lewin 1963).
Boreal Chorus Frog  
*Pseudacris maculata*

**General Description**

Adults have tiny, almost unnoticeable toe pads; a dark line extends from the snout through the eye to the groin. Basic coloration varies, with background color green, brown, gray, or reddish. Typically three to five dark longitudinal stripes are present on the head and back; in some individuals the stripes may be broken into spots. Adult body length is 0.75 to 1.5 inches. Eggs and tadpoles: eggs are laid in clusters of 20 to 100; clusters are usually less than 1 inch across and attached to submerged vegetation. Tadpoles are brown/bronze with eyes located on the sides of the head.

**Habitat**

Boreal Chorus Frogs are regularly found in the water only during the breeding period in spring. They announce their presence this time of year by calling frequently at night and sporadically during the day. Following breeding, they move into adjacent uplands and are rarely seen. In eastern Montana, they breed in temporary ponds and small lakes surrounded by prairie (or occasionally open forest) habitats. Eggs hatch in about 2 weeks and tadpoles take 8 weeks to metamorphose. Inhabits marshes, ponds, small lakes in all life zones including lower alpine (Baxter and Stone 1980). When not breeding, generally found in damp grassy-marshy areas or damp forests near water, but has been found up to 0.5 km from water (Nussbaum et al. 1983, Hammerson 1982).
**General Description**

Adults are light to dark brown, gray, or olive green with dark spots (frequently with lighter centers) on the back, sides, and legs. The number of spots and spotting pattern varies. The back and sides are often covered with small bumps. The undersides of the legs are bright red, salmon or orange; this bright color may extend up to the chin or be replaced by a light, mottled gray on the chin, chest, and/or belly. Adult body length is 2 to 4 inches. Eggs and Tadpoles: Eggs are laid at the water surface in large, globular masses of 150 to 500. Tadpoles are dark green with gold flecking above and iridescent bronze below. They may reach 3 inches in length; their eyes are located on the top of the head.

**Habitat**

Columbia Spotted Frogs are regularly found at water's edge in or near forest openings. Wetlands at or near treeline are also used, but populations are uncommon in large, open intermountain valleys. Breeding takes place in lakes, ponds (temporary and permanent), springs, and occasionally backwaters or beaver ponds in streams. All the egg masses in a particular pond are often found in the same location at the margin of the pond. Young and adult Columbia Spotted Frogs often disperse into marsh and forest habitats, but are not usually found far from open water. Reproduction mainly in ponds, occasionally in springs, shallow streams, or puddles (Turner 1958). Found on grassy/swampy banks of mountain water bodies (Black 1969, Franz 1971), although may avoid dense/tall grass (Miller 1978). Feed mainly in riparian habitat, occasionally in bordering meadow/woods. Juveniles forage farther from water (Miller 1978).
General Description

Adult Plains Spadefoot are gray or brown with darker mottling on the back and white on the belly. The back may be covered with smallish tubercles tipped in yellow or orange, and often present as a rough hourglass-shaped marking. Some individuals have indistinct longitudinal streaking. In adults the pupils are vertically elongate in bright light; there is a hard lump or "boss" between the eyes, slightly anterior of an imaginary midline connecting the eyes. Prominent parotoid glands posterior to the eyes are absent. A single hard and dark wedge-shaped spade is present on each hind foot. Maximum snout-vent length (SVL) is about 6.0 centimeters. Males have dark patches on the inner 2-3 digits of the forelimbs during breeding, and have an expanded bi-lobed vocal sac. The male breeding call is a brief snore.

Tadpoles may be brown or green to whitish on the back, or mottled gray to dull olive-yellow, sometimes with a bluish iridescence. The belly is an iridescent golden color; the gut coil is not visible through the body wall. The dorsal fin is clear or with sparse yellowish flecking; the anus is at the base of the tail on the midline. The body shape is globular, with the eyes positioned dorsally, and total length is usually up to 7.0 centimeters. The mandibles are frequently cusped; labial tooth rows are 0/0 to 6/6, but most often 3/4 or 4/4. Oral papillae completely encircle the mouth. Eggs are black above and white below, about 1.5 to 1.6 millimeters in diameter and surrounded by two jelly layers, and deposited in elliptical masses of 10 to 250 eggs.

Habitat

Little specific habitat information is available. This species is usually found in areas with soft sandy/gravelly soils near permanent or temporary bodies of water. For much of each year it lives largely inactive in burrows of its own construction or occupies rodent burrows, and enters water only to breed. Following heavy rains, adults have been reported in water up to 30 centimeters deep in flooded wagon wheel ruts, temporary rain pools formed in wide flat-bottom coulees, water tanks, and badland seep ponds, and tadpoles and toadlets have been observed in stock ponds and small ephemeral reservoirs, usually in sagebrush-grassland habitats (Cope 1879, Mosimann and Rabb 1952, Dood 1980, Reichel 1995, Hendricks 1999, Hossack et al. 2003).
**General Description**

Adults vary in color pattern, but background color is usually dark, with lighter blotches of yellow, tan, or green. Adults are large and heavy-bodied with a body length of 3 to 6 inches. Eggs and larvae: eggs are typically laid in small clusters of 5 to 120, but may be laid singly. Larvae are typically pale green or brown. They have external gills and are relatively large and heavy-bodied (0.75 to 4 inches). Coloration geographically variable to an extreme, often mottled, blotched, or spotted; adults are stocky, with 11 to 14 (usually 12 to 13) costal grooves, a broad head, small eyes, and tubercles on the soles of the feet; pond-type larva (but lacks balancers), with three large pairs of gills, vomerine teeth in U-shaped pattern, and dorsal fin extending to region of axilla; adults usually are about 15 to 22 cm in total length (to about 34 cm) (Stebbins 1954, 1985; Behler and King 1979; Conant and Collins 1991).

**Habitat**

Tiger Salamanders in Montana are primarily associated with prairie or agricultural habitats. They breed in ponds, lakes, springs, intermittent streams, and stock ponds, usually those without fish present. Adults go to the breeding ponds soon after snowmelt; after breeding, adults may remain in the ponds or move to upland areas and live in burrows. Eggs hatch in 2 to 5 weeks and metamorphosis takes 2 to 24 months. In some locations larval salamanders never transform, but rather become sexually mature and breed while retaining external gills (referred to as neoteny). These salamanders are often called “axolotls” or “water dogs.” Are benthic in ponds but may enter upper water column at night. At high elevation, tend to select warmest water in ponds (rarely above 25 C). Shallows during day, deep water at night.
General Description

The skin of the adult Western Toad is covered with small round or oval warts on a background color that is usually green or brown; the warts may be reddish-brown and encircled by dark pigment. Parotoid glands are oval and larger than the eyes, cranial crests are absent or indistinct. The eyes have horizontal pupils. Usually there is a light stripe down the middle of the back, but this may be absent or inconspicuous in juveniles. The underside of each hind foot has two brown tubercles that lack sharp cutting edges. Mature males have a dark patch on the inner surface of the innermost digit (“thumb”) during breeding. Males lack a vocal sac, however, they may produce a repeated chirping sound. Males rarely exceed 9.5 centimeters snout-vent length (SVL), females rarely 11.0 centimeters.

The body and tail of tadpoles is black or dark brown, with the eyes about midway between the dorsal midline and edge of the head. Labial tooth rows are 2/3, oral papillae are restricted to the sides of the mouth, and the anus is on the midline at the front end of the ventral tail fin; maximum total length is about 3.5 centimeters. The eggs are black, about 1.5 to 1.8 millimeters diameter, and are laid in long 5 millimeters-wide strings of double-layered jelly in two rows (sometimes one or three) that appear to be a single zigzag row.

Habitat

Habitats used by Western Toads in Montana are similar to those reported for other regions, and include low elevation beaver ponds, reservoirs, streams, marshes, lake shores, potholes, wet meadows, and marshes, to high elevation ponds, fens, and tamaracks at or near treeline (Rodgers and Jellison 1942, Brunson and Demaree 1951, Miller 1978, Marnell 1997, Werner et al. 1998, Boundy 2001). Forest cover in or near encounter sites is often unreported, but Western Toads have been noted in open-canopy ponderosa pine woodlands and closed-canopy dry conifer forest in Sanders County (Boundy 2001), willow wetland thickets and aspen stands bordering Engelmann spruce stands in Beaverhead County (Jean et al. 2002), and mixed ponderosa pine/cottonwood/willow sites or Douglas-fir/ponderosa pine forest in Ravalli and Missoula counties (Paul Hendricks, personal observation).

Elsewhere the Western Toad is known to utilize a wide variety of habitats, including desert springs and streams, meadows and woodlands, mountain wetlands, beaver ponds, marshes, ditches, and backwater channels of rivers where they prefer shallow areas with mud bottoms (Nussbaum et al. 1983, Baxter and Stone 1985, Russell and Bauer 1993, Koch and Peterson 1995, Hammerson 1999). Forest cover around occupied montane wetlands may include aspen, Douglas-fir, lodgepole pine, Engelmann spruce, and subalpine fir; in local situations it may also be found in ponderosa pine forest. They also occur in urban settings, sometimes congregating under streetlights at night to feed on insects (Hammerson 1999). Normally they remain fairly close to ponds, lakes, reservoirs, and slow-moving rivers and streams during the day, but may range widely at night. Eggs and larvae develop in still, shallow areas of ponds, lakes, or reservoirs or in pools of slow-moving streams, often where there is sparse emergent vegetation. Adult and juvenile Western Toads dig burrows in loose soil or use burrows of small mammals, or occupy shallow shelters under logs or rocks. At least some Western Toads hibernate in terrestrial burrows or cavities, apparently where conditions prevent freezing.