

“Living with Wildlife” is a series of nine wildlife management guides for the agricultural and natural resource sectors, as well as rural land owners. Options for wildlife management, worker safety, and animal deterrents are provided for each species. Many guides suggest completing wildlife conflict management plans. Web links to the guides and other resources are on the back page. Consult the “*Conflict Reduction Guide*” for wildlife deterrent management options.



Gopher snake

Snakes found near areas where people are working can surprise and concern workers. In the past, people killed snakes out of fear. We now recognize that snakes are valuable to agriculture for rodent control. Most snake species are now at risk and all are protected under the *BC Wildlife Act*.

### Western Rattlesnake, *Crotalus oreganus*, also called Northern Pacific Rattlesnake



Rattlesnakes occur near dry hillsides in the interior of BC. They are shy snakes preferring to hide or get away from areas of activity which they sense through ground vibrations. Rattlesnakes kill their prey with a venomous bite which is also dangerous to humans. They will travel through or hunt for mice in agricultural areas, sometimes setting up summer foraging territories near crop areas where mice are found. Rattlesnakes often stay in the same spot for days basking in the sun, or if it is hot, staying cool in the shade.

- Triangular, wedge-shaped head
- Vertical cat's eye pupils
- Rattle at the end of the tail
- Grey-green or brown oval-shaped body markings surrounded by pale edges
- New born rattlesnakes have a single “button” at the end of the tail so do not rattle but can bite!

### Great Basin Gopher Snake, *Pituophis catenifer* *deserticola*, commonly called “bull snake”



This common snake of the southern interior of BC is not venomous but is often mistaken for a rattlesnake because of its similar colour, size and habitat. When threatened, gopher snakes may make a hissing noise. Gopher snakes can climb into vines and shrubs and often explore underground rodent burrows. Growing to over a meter in size, this snake is often welcome in vineyards and farms where it preys primarily on mice and voles.

- Small narrow head
- Round dark pupils
- Pointed tail
- Square-shaped markings down the body
- When threatened, may vibrate its tail in imitation of a rattlesnake

## SNAKES IN BRITISH COLUMBIA *cont'd*



### Northern American Racer, *Coluber constrictor*

Adults are an unmarked grey or brown colour with pale undersides that can be tinged with blue. Young racers are spotted. Slender and fast with small heads, racers have large eyes. They are day-time hunters that tolerate hot temperatures.

### Northern Rubber Boa

This small brown snake has a blunt head and tail, tiny eyes and fine scales. Active at night, it usually hides under cover during the day and is rarely encountered.



### Garter Snake (three species)

Small to medium-sized snakes, the Common, Terrestrial and Northwestern garter snakes have pale or yellow stripes down their bodies as well as small spots. They prefer moist areas and will go in water to catch tadpoles and fish as well as eating rodents. They are easily frightened away but may bite or secrete a smelly residue when handled.

### Desert Night Snake

This small, seldom seen snake is the rarest snake in Canada. It lives in talus slopes of the southern interior, preying on lizards. It is beige with brown spots and has a distinctive dark saddle behind the head.



## SNAKES NEED OUR HELP

- Understanding snakes is the first step to appreciating them.
- Snakes have suffered declines since human development has taken away their habitat.
- Vehicles kill significant numbers of snakes each year. Watch for snakes basking on the road when driving vehicles including tractors and ATVs. Keep snake tongs or a long stick in the vehicle for moving them off the road.
- It is against the law to harass or kill a native snake or keep it as a pet.
- Post snake information bulletins and ID posters in lunch rooms and work sheds so field crews can identify snakes and feel safe around them. Posters are available at [www.osca.org/](http://www.osca.org/) "Living with Wildlife" pages. They are available in Spanish, French and Punjabi.

# On the Farm

## MANAGING FOR SNAKES

- Leave gullies as migration corridors for snakes and other wildlife.
- Maintain natural habitat buffers around rocky slopes where snakes have their dens.
- Before mowing and tilling walk over the area and check for snakes.
- Create snake hiding habitat away from work areas. Snakes like to get out of the heat to shady spots. Rock piles and wood cover boards placed away from activity areas might prevent a snake from hiding under grapevines or in a tool shed.
- If you work in snake country, stairways and low platforms are ideal hiding spots for snakes. To prevent accidental snake encounters, make sure stair risers are fully-framed in not open.
- Keep vineyard bird netting elevated off the ground so snakes don't get tangled in it and store it off the ground when not in use.
- Consider installing snake barrier fencing if rattlesnakes are frequently encountered. See Conflict Reduction Guide #8 or page 4 references.



## Best Practices Tips

- ✓ Never put your hands under lumber or inside dark spaces where a snake might hide.
- ✓ Wear high boots when working in snake country where the ground is hidden by vegetation.
- ✓ Use a pole to check underneath lumber or bins where snakes might hide.
- ✓ Knowledge about snakes will help you work comfortably in areas where snakes occur. Post snake information in work places.
- ✓ Although only the rattlesnake is venomous, some snakes will bite if handled roughly.
- ✓ Snakes are active from April to October

# Worker Safety

“Rattlesnake country” is also the vacation spot and fruit and grape growing region of the province. Despite frequent encounters with rattlesnakes only a few people each year report to hospitals with rattlesnake bites.

## IF YOU HEAR A RATTLESNAKE RATTLING...

- Stop and find out which direction the noise is coming from.
- Slowly move away. If you are in striking range, stay still and get someone else to distract the snake.
- Do not attempt to move a rattlesnake unless it is necessary. Most will move away on their own.

## IF A PERSON IS BITTEN

- Remain calm and make sure someone watches the snake so no one else is bitten. Do not kill or collect the snake.
- Reassure the person that bites are not fatal and rarely have long-term effects.
- Drive the person to the closest hospital. If possible have someone call the hospital ahead.
- Some bites are “dry” with no venom.
- Venom works on the nerves so a person should never drive themselves.
- Do not apply a tourniquet, make cuts or suck the wound.

## RELOCATING RATTLESNAKES

- If you live or work in an area frequented by rattlesnake there may be times that rattlesnakes need to be moved. Proper equipment and employee training is recommended.
- Snake tongs are a safe tool to relocate rattlesnakes. Lay a tall plastic garbage pail on its side and encourage the snake to go in using a long stick or broom if tongs are not available. Carefully secure the lid and quickly move the snake to a vegetated area away from work areas. Slowly lower the container and carefully remove the lid, allowing the snake to gradually move out.
- Snakes can over-heat so never leave a snake container in the sun or in a car. If snakes are frequently encountered in your work place, consider having a container dedicated for snakes. Cut small air holes in the lid and label it “live rattlesnake”.
- If snakes must be moved, relocate them toward hillsides and natural habitat no more than 500 m away. Snakes must find their home dens to survive through the winter.



### Further information:

- “Guide to Safely Relocating Rattlesnakes” can be downloaded from [www.osca.org](http://www.osca.org) “Living with Wildlife” pages.
- Snake ID posters and pamphlets [www.osca.org](http://www.osca.org) “Living with Wildlife” pages.
- “Snake barrier Fencing” <http://www.soscp.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/02/Snake-Barrier-Fencing.pdf>
- Order snake tongs from [www.tongs.com](http://www.tongs.com).

# Contacts & Resources

## “Living with Wildlife in BC” management guide series:

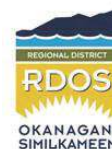
- # 1 Bear
  - #2 Cougar
  - #3 Coyote & Wolf
  - #4 Rodents
  - #5 Snakes
  - #6 Starlings
  - #7 Ungulates
  - #8 Conflict Reduction: mitigation options for wildlife safety and control
- Mitigation Decision Matrix: calendar of wildlife occurrences and recommended controls

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The “Living with Wildlife” series is available for downloading and distribution (personal, noncommercial use) on the following websites:

- [www.osca.org](http://www.osca.org) “Living With Wildlife” pages
- <http://www.rdos.bc.ca/departments/public-works/wildsafe-bc-bear-aware/>
- [www.bcwgc.org](http://www.bcwgc.org) Health and Safety Section

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