

Snakes

- British Columbia is home to 9 protected species of snakes
- The rattlesnake (*Crotalus oreganus oreganus*) is the only venomous species in BC that may pose a risk to humans, though bites are very uncommon and are rarely fatal
- Snakes are Schedule A animals under the *BC Wildlife Act*; it is illegal to capture or kill them without a permit



Garter snake

Understanding Snakes

Snakes are generally shy animals and will often leave an area on their own. Most species pose no threat, but seeing snakes can give some people strong feelings of fear. It is normal to catch glimpses of snakes in gardens, woods, hiking, or while they are out sunning themselves. They rely on external sources, like sunlight and shade, to control their internal body temperature.



Did you know?

Snakes provide excellent natural rodent and slug control!

Northern Pacific rattlesnake

Snakes...

- breed in the spring after emerging from their winter den (hibernaculum)
- some species lay eggs, and others give birth to live young
- young are born between July and September, and born fully independent
- snakes are carnivorous with a varied diet that may include insects, frogs, tadpoles, toads, small mammals, fish, and occasionally birds

Common Conflicts

Snakes do not cause damage to structures or other property they may inhabit. They may become targets of control if they enter and/or become trapped in houses (basements), or in some cases, if rattlesnakes are found within housing developments during construction when hibernacula are uncovered.

Humane Choices

Killing snakes for nuisance reasons is illegal.

Relocation of snakes should only be done outside breeding season and within the animal's home range, and as per the *BC Wildlife Act* (with permit).

The BC SPCA strongly encourages non-lethal, non-contact methods. Prevention and exclusion comes first, and if necessary, eviction. Eviction should be done carefully for human safety, and by qualified personnel.

Conflict Resolution

If the finder is particularly confident with species identification, snakes that accidentally enter structures can be removed and gently placed outside by hand capture, using gloves, tongs, or a box or bucket. If the species cannot be confirmed, or a venomous snake is identified, a herpetologist or expert snake professional should be consulted for removal. For more information, *flip page over*.



Recommended Actions & Methods

Prevention & Exclusion Before any conflict, and to prevent future issues

Remove potential food sources for snake prey (rodents)

- ✓ Secure garbage bins and compost
- ✓ Bird feeders not overflowing, no pet food outside
- ✓ Food stored in rodent-proof containers
- ✓ Clean spilled food, waste, crumbs, etc.

Maintain structures to prevent access

- ✓ Block access to underneath porches, decks and crawl spaces, remove wood and brush piles, trim tall vegetation around building where snakes may be a problem
- ✓ Use a tight mesh fence to deter snake entry and protect large areas (e.g. school playgrounds)
- ✓ Seal all holes large enough for snake entry - snakes can enter through cracks or holes they can fit their head through, even if only a few millimeters wide
- ✓ Pay attention to possible openings at ground level and structures or plantings that snakes may use to climb

Eviction

Evict the animal

- ✓ Use a specialized one-way door to allow snake to leave, but not re-enter
- ✓ Leave in place for at least one month, or until the following spring if installed in fall
- ✓ Permanently seal openings after den undisturbed for several nights
- ✓ Follow all prevention and exclusion steps above

These are legal, regulated methods for euthanasia when animals are suffering - but they are **not recommended*** as they can cause further suffering and/or are difficult to administer:

- Shot to brain of trapped animal or free-ranging animal
- Cervical dislocation
- Injection of MS-222 (TMS)
- Manually applied blunt trauma that induces immediate unconsciousness

*email wildlifecontrol@spca.bc.ca for information on these methods

It is **illegal** to use...

- Poison
- Pithing
- Glue trap
- Drowning
- Carbon dioxide or carbon monoxide
- Decapitation
- Freezing (including dry ice)
- Electrocution

