

## Reptile Facts

Short-horned lizards are tiny creatures. An adult would fit on a credit card and their live-born young are the size of a dime.

When disturbed, a bullsnake will curl up, hiss and shake its tail, imitating a rattlesnake. This strategy helps to deter predators.

Hibernacula (winter denning sites) are often shared by several snake species. It is not unusual for rattlesnakes, bullsnakes and garter snakes to winter together.

Rattlesnakes can travel up to 25km away from their hibernaculum in order to find concentrations of food, such as Richardson ground squirrel colonies.

## Meet Grassland Region Reptiles

In Alberta, grassland reptiles are at the northern extent of their range in North America. Short-horned Lizards are found only in the far southeast corner of Alberta in the Milk River Basin. Prairie rattlesnakes are associated with major river valleys in southeastern Alberta - the South Saskatchewan, Red Deer, Bow, Oldman and Milk River. There are only a handful of observations of yellow-bellied racers in Alberta, all from the extreme southeast corner of the province. Hognose snakes are known from fewer than 100 sites in Alberta and are loosely associated with river valleys in the southeastern part of the province. Bullsnakes and garter snakes can be found throughout the prairies, usually near coulees and large river systems.



Greater Short-horned Lizard - At Risk - Endangered

### Short-horned Lizards Require

- Sparsely vegetated south-facing slopes at the interface of prairie and coulees.
- Exposed soil surface to dig shallow burrows for over-wintering.

### Snakes Require

- Sandy, brushy areas in badlands, coulees and river valleys.
- Rock outcrops or steep slopes with fissures, holes or burrows in the side suitable for a hibernaculum (overwintering den).
- Hognose snakes require open prairie with a sandy substrate.



Bullsnake - Sensitive



Prairie Rattlesnake  
Sensitive - Special Concern



Plains Hognose Snake  
May be at Risk



Eastern Yellow-bellied Racer  
Sensitive



Garter Snakes (Wandering, Plains, Red-sided)  
Sensitive



For information on the Western Painted Turtle (Sensitive), see the Wetland Species Fact Sheet.

# Prairie Rattlesnake Life Cycle

## Late April - Early May

Emerge from hibernacula.  
Non-pregnant females and males begin moving to prairie to forage and mate.

## Mid September

Return to hibernacula for over-wintering.  
Many snakes will spend the winter together, including different species.



## June - August

Mate on open prairie.  
Females mature at 5-7 years old and reproduce every 2+ years.

## Late August - October

Females give birth to 4 - 12 live young at birthing areas called rookeries. Rookeries are usually near hibernaculum and have good vegetation cover.

# Beneficial Management Practices for Reptiles

## General

- Do not disturb shrub communities. Shrubs are used for foraging and shelter from heat.
- Avoid disturbing south, southeast and east facing slopes that have short, sparse vegetative cover. Restrict livestock access if needed.
- Tolerate Richardson's ground squirrels (gophers) and American badgers if they are not causing excessive damage. Squirrels are an important food source for snakes and both species dig burrows that reptiles use for refuge. Poison is especially harmful as it can accidentally kill reptiles.
- Protect known hibernacula from all types of disturbance and report these sites to MULTISAR.
- Seed tall, dense crops away from known snake trails because they impede snake movement.

## Grazed Land

- Avoid grazing near known hibernacula in spring and fall, as snakes bask near them at these times.
- Avoid grazing on slopes when they are wet. Slopes are fragile and easily trampled.
- Create variability in pastures by strategically placing salt blocks and troughs. Place salt blocks at least 200m away from river escarpments, coulee edges and south facing valley slopes.
- Avoid continuous and/or heavy grazing in reptile habitats. Rotational or deferred grazing systems allow controlled timing in these important habitats.
- Adjust stocking rates based on range health and climate. Reduce stocking rates during dry periods.

## Set-backs

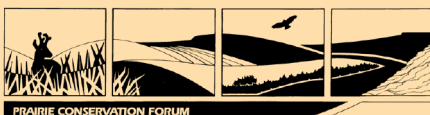
- Bullsnake and rattlesnake rookeries have a 200m set-back from March 15<sup>th</sup> to October 31<sup>st</sup> and a 50m to 200m set-back (depending on level of disturbance) between November 1<sup>st</sup> and March 14<sup>th</sup>.
- In short-horned lizard habitat, low disturbance and high disturbance activities are restricted within 100m and 200m, respectively.



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Conserving Alberta's Wild Side



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