

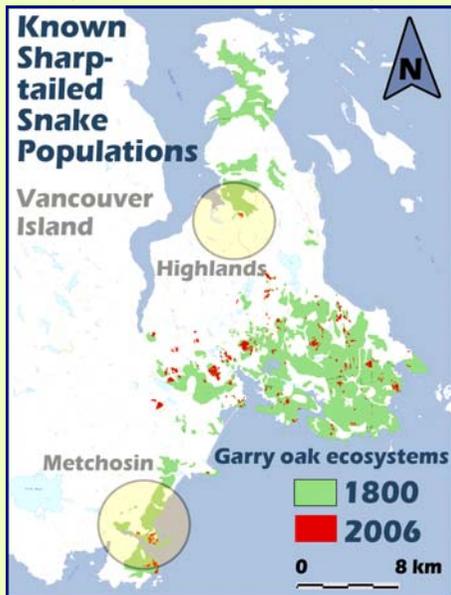
Sharp-tailed Snakes in Our Backyard!



Earthworm -sized juveniles have red backs with black-and-white belly bands.

The tiny Sharp-tailed Snake has a harmless thorn-like structure on the end of its tail. Adults are chestnut brown while juveniles are red. All feature distinctive black-and-white bars on the belly. There is no line down the centre of their back.

Little is known about the life history of these secretive snakes. They live on south-facing, rocky slopes and in sunny Douglas-fir and Arbutus forest openings. Sharp-tailed Snakes are thought to feed mainly on slugs.



The sharp-tailed snake is one of the rarest snakes in British Columbia.

Contia tenuis is considered Critically Imperiled (red-listed) in British Columbia. This slug-eating reptile is known from only a few sites in the Gulf Islands and southern Vancouver Island. Their remaining habitat is disappearing with urban development. The few known Sharp-tailed Snake populations are small and isolated.



Adults are uniform rich brown on the back and have black-and-white barring on the underside.

Sharp-tailed snakes are generally active earlier than other snakes in BC activity peaking in early spring and fall. Moist, rotting logs, brush piles, and sun-exposed rocky slopes are key habitat features for Sharp-tails. In late spring, it's likely that females deposit 3 to 5 eggs underground or in grass clumps; eggs may hatch in the fall.

Snake habitat is being eliminated by expanding development in our region. Other threats include loss of rocks, forest litter and logs, weed invasions, cars, bikes, and cats.

What can we do to help? >>

What can WE do to protect these rare snakes?

On your Land



Snake-friendly gardening can make your backyard a better place for native plants and wildlife, and may give you a more productive garden with fewer pests!

- **Provide hiding places**

Snakes need shelter from weather and predators. Leave natural cover like leaf litter, fallen logs, bark, and rocks. Natural thickets and scrubby patches also provide habitat for hunting, egg-laying, and refuge. You can also build rock and brush piles in sunny locations.

- **Provide warm sites**

Cold-blooded snakes need places to absorb the Sun's energy in safety. If you have a sunny, rocky slope, avoid disturbing the rocks and logs. You can place rocks and logs in sunny areas for resident snakes. Connect isolated rocky patches with habitat structure.

- **Control invasive plants**

Invasive species like Scotch broom and Himalayan blackberry can shade critical sun-exposed snake habitat. Remove weeds from rocky slopes to help snakes.

- **Control pets**

Pet cats sometimes catch Sharp-tailed Snakes. You can protect this rare reptile by keeping your cat indoors, and by providing hiding spots for snakes.

- **Provide a pesticide-free environment**

Chemical pesticides and herbicides can harm wildlife. Chemical slug poison could be hazardous to Sharp-tailed Snakes since they are known to eat slugs. Contact HAT to learn more about organic lawns and gardening!

- **Tread gently**

You can reduce accidental snake deaths by taking special care when mowing tall grass or using a weed-trimmer. Before cutting, stir the area so that snakes have a chance to escape. When moving rocks, be careful not to crush animals sheltering there.

- **Leave natural areas**

The best way you can help sharp-tailed snakes is to **leave parts of your property in a natural state**. Protecting south-facing, rocky slopes is especially important since these provide critical habitat.

Pest control!
Sharp-tailed snakes have special, needle-like teeth to help them eat slugs.

In Your Neighbourhood

- **Protect sensitive areas**

Restricting activity on talus slopes and rocky knolls will prevent unintentional damage to sensitive habitats, and avoid disturbing this shy species.

- **Keep pets on a leash**

Dogs can damage sensitive ecosystems. Keeping Fido under control and on the trail will help ensure survival of this endangered snake.

- **Report sightings!**

Biologists know little about the activity and life history of Sharp-tailed Snakes. **You can help** by reporting suspected sightings to the Conservation Data Centre.

You may have found a new population!

- **Support conservation efforts**

Landowners in your area are already working with the recovery team to restore and protect habitat on their properties.

Get involved in land-use planning decisions that may affect sensitive habitats in your community.

- **Watch out!**

Keep a look-out when biking along forest trails (especially at dawn and dusk) to avoid Sharp-tailed Snakes and other small wildlife.

- **Spread the word!**

Share this information with your friends and neighbours! By working together, we can ensure that our grand-children will also enjoy our region's unique natural history.



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South-facing, rocky slopes are critical for nesting and nursery sites. Favoured by both snakes and people, habitats are disappearing.

Although they live in one of the most populated parts of the province, few British Columbians have ever seen the elusive Sharp-Tailed Snake.

Get involved!

Habitat Acquisition Trust (HAT) works closely with the *Sharp-tailed Snake Recovery Team*, community groups, and private landowners to research and protect this rare snake. Because much of the habitat for this species is on private land, landowner stewardship is critical for the protection of critical snake habitat.

Residents in your area are monitoring existing and suspected habitat sites to help biologists determine the distribution of this elusive reptile. Using recent air photos, expert biologist identified potential habitat. Landowners in these areas are encouraged to monitor “artificial cover objects” placed in likely sites. Participants learn to identify Sharp-tailed Snakes and how to monitor the cover objects. Imagine discovering a rare species on your land!

Stewardship by private landowners is essential for the survival of Sharp-tailed Snakes in Canada.

HAT is helping communities and landowners to coexist with this endangered snake. We are meeting with landowners like you who are interested in protecting our region's unique ecosystems. To learn more, contact HAT (250)995-2428. email: hatmail@hat.bc.ca or email the Sharp-tailed Snake Recovery Team Sharp-tailedSnake@Victoria1.gov.bc.ca



A landowner on Pender Island has worked with conservation biologists since 1996 to help determine much of what is known about this threatened species.

One property where these snakes live has now been permanently protected by a *conservation covenant* held by the Islands Trust Fund.

More information

BC Ministry of Environment
Biodiversity Branch
<http://www.env.gov.bc.ca/wld/serisk.htm>

BC Conservation Data Centre
<http://srmwww.gov.bc.ca/cdc/>
(250) 356-0928 Toll Free via Enquiry BC

Species At Risk in Canada
<http://www.speciesatrisk.gc.ca/>
<http://www.sararegistry.gc.ca/>

Garry Oak Ecosystem Recovery Team (250) 383 3293



Habitat Acquisition Trust
(250) 995 2428

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~ Creating a Conservation Legacy ~

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