



Volunteers In Parks

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Common Wall Lizard



Common Wall Lizard



Common Wall Lizard

Lizards, Lizards Everywhere!

By Colleen Long

I hadn't intended on writing another feature article on invasive species, but lately I have been shocked at the incredible spread of the introduced Common Wall Lizards (*Podarcis muralis*), previously referred to as European Wall Lizards. They seem to be everywhere.

The first Common Wall Lizards were released in BC on the Saanich Peninsula in 1967 and then another introduction took place in the early 1970s when 12 wall lizards were released near Brentwood Bay into a private zoo. These introduced lizards came from an area in north central Italy, which has a Mediterranean climate much like our own. By 2004, they had not spread far, but in the last couple of decades their range has greatly expanded. Most are found on southern Vancouver Island from Swartz Bay to Metchosin, but there are other occurrences in Campbell River, Cobble Hill, Mill Bay, Shawnigan Lake and on Denman Island. A couple of lizards were found on the BC Mainland (Osyoos, Summerland and North Vancouver), but fortunately they did not survive. The population has grown to an estimated 500,000 wall lizards on Vancouver Island.

Though they do spread and increase their range on their own, their rapid spread in the past few decades is thought to be due to people moving them around. There is one account in the early 90s of someone capturing and releasing six lizards on their property on Triangle Mountain.

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Most introductions are accidental, with lizards being moved around on farm equipment, in hay bales, horse or livestock trailers, firewood or even as eggs in potted plants. Two lizards that made their way to Osoyoos, were found in a load of grapes from Vancouver Island. One was caught and died in captivity and the other ended up as road kill. Hopefully, no other lizards have made it that far afield. Though Common Wall Lizards are beyond control on Vancouver Island, the hope is that we can stop their spread into further reaches of BC.

Like all invasive species, there is a worry that the Common Wall Lizard will have a negative impact on some of our native species. The Northern Alligator Lizard (*Elgaria coerulea*) is the native lizard species found on Vancouver Island, the Gulf Islands and most of southern BC. Both lizards are similar in size, approximately 20cm in length, but you can distinguish between the two by their shape, colour and the way they move.



Northern Alligator Lizard



Common Wall Lizard

Common Wall Lizards are more slender than Northern Alligator Lizards, they have long toes, which aids them in climbing, and as adults they have a mottled, green colouration. Young wall lizards are coppery brown in colour. Wall lizards move incredibly fast, are very good climbers and can be found on the ground, or scurrying up a wall or other structures. Northern Alligator Lizards, have much shorter toes, are less slender and are brownish in colour with dark blotches. They are also slower moving and are generally found on the ground.

Other differences between the two lizards are that the Common Wall Lizards lay eggs and can lay several batches a year, whereas the Northern Alligator Lizards give birth to live young and only have one batch per year.

Common Wall Lizards tend to like urban environments with rock and stone walls, gardens, wood piles and other structures and tend to prefer open, sunny, habitats and not dense forest environments. Northern Alligator Lizards can cope well with cooler and wetter climates allowing them to live in many different habitats and they prefer to live in natural undisturbed habitats, though both species need open areas to bask in the sun.

It appears both lizards do overlap in some habitats and can co-exist together, though the wall lizard is always found in greater numbers. They share a similar diet of insects, spiders and millipedes, though at least one wall lizard has also been seen eating a young garter snake and they are also cannibalistic.



Sharp-Tailed Snake

Photo by Christian Englestoft

Given this, researchers are very concerned that they may also eat the young of newborn Northern Alligator Lizards and eggs and hatchlings of our endangered Sharp-Tailed Snake (*Contia tenuis*), shown above.

Currently the species seem somewhat separated by habitat, with the Common Wall Lizard preferring disturbed habitats near humans. But due to their high numbers and the broad distribution of the species and factors such as climate change, more research is needed to determine the risk they may pose to the native fauna of southern BC.

What You Can Do

To help with the research, you can join [iNaturalist](#) and record your sightings. Citizen science is a great way to increase scientific knowledge on species. You can also send an image or observation onto Gavin Hanke (ghanke@royalbcmuseum.bc.ca), Curator, Vertebrate Zoology at the Royal BC Museum.

If sending an image, please include a detailed location (street address of where the photo was taken), or if using an iPhone, the GPS coordinates are included in the photo.

So the next time a small creature scurries past you, stop to check and see if it is a lizard. If it is a lizard, try getting a shot of it and post the photo on iNaturalist. To get a good photo Gavin suggests zooming the phone's camera as much as possible and take the 1st shot from a distance and then gradually and carefully move closer. Sudden movements make them bolt, so you have to move very slowly. I saw a lizard the other day, but it was gone before I could get my phone out. Next time I'll be ready!



Northern Alligator Lizard

Sources

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The Reptiles of British Columbia – Alligator Lizard, Ministry of Environment.

The Reptiles of British Columbia - European Wall Lizard, Ministry of Environment

All pictures are provided by Gavin Hanke unless otherwise specified.

Volunteer Profile - Lisa Davison

Park Steward at Mill Hill Regional Park since July 2016



What do you most enjoy about volunteering with Regional Parks?

Sharing all the beautiful things I see throughout the four seasons, mostly flora and some fauna with others that are out enjoying the parks. Volunteering allows me to give back to something I'm super passionate about and sparks so much joy.

What is your favourite volunteer memory or experience?

I was sauntering along Mill Woods trail observing all the new, spring growth in the forest, thinking how lush everything looked. I craned my neck upwards, following a big, old Douglas Fir trunk to meet the inquisitive gaze of a Barred Owl staring right at me. Instant gratification filled me viewing nature in its natural habitat. A young couple were hiking up Calypso trail, I waved and motioned up at the owl. They were here on holiday from New Delhi in India and overjoyed to have seen their first owl in such close proximity.

Tell us a bit about yourself?

I was born in England and grew up in Australia, so have a funny accent. With an inborn love of ocean and mountains, I travelled to Canada backpacking for one year and fell in love. That was 14 yrs ago and the rest is history. I absolutely love where I live and feel gratitude daily to be surrounded by the bounty of green space we have. My thirst for adventure and time outdoors is unquenched. I am inspired by nature with an appetite for mountain biking, backpacking, photography, journal writing, camping, hiking, kayaking and painting with acrylics amongst other things.

Staff Profile - Stuart Walsh

CRD Regional Parks Senior Ranger since March 2020

What do you most enjoy about working at Regional Parks?

We live in an amazing part of the world with many great parks that we often take for granted. With the number of people moving to the area, and the number of visitors to our parks increasing each year, I love the fact that I get to contribute to protection and management of the parks and regional trails in our own backyard so that future generations can have the same opportunity to connect with nature that we have today.

Tell us a bit about yourself.

I am a long time Victoria resident, and having completed a Diploma in Environmental Technology at Camosun College before finishing off a degree in Geography and Biology at UVIC and have worked in the area pretty much since. Workwise, I spent a few years self-employed as an Environmental Consultant before working for BC Parks for the past 17 years. When I'm not working my 2nd job as an unpaid Uber driver ferrying my two boys (Kai and Tait) to various sports and activities, I'm usually out hiking a local trail with my wife Kristi and our dog Mylo. When time permits (rarely with an old house, 2 boys and a dog!) we enjoy multi-day kayaking trips at any of the number of great paddling areas around the island.



Volunteer & Park Updates



With visitor numbers climbing and the temperatures slowly catching up, CRD parks have been abuzz with activity over the past few months. CRD Regional Parks has increased staff presence in the parks, ensuring park interpreters and rangers are visiting heavily trafficked parks. Staff have been doing outreach in the parks to educate visitors about social distancing, monitor visitor use, and continue to enforce park bylaws.

Regional Parks staff have also been busy with many new projects on the go. Recently, the Board approved the start of management planning processes for Mount Work, East Sooke, and a joint plan for Roche Cove/ Matheson Lake regional parks. To follow along with these management plans, you can check in on our [current initiatives page](#) where we will post updates and information. Public engagement is expected to begin in early fall.



Another exciting thing to look forward to in fall is the official opening of the southern section of Sooke Hills Wilderness Regional Park. The CRD is working to develop a roughly 60 stall parking lot adjacent to Highway 14, highway access lanes, a pit-toilet building, at least 20kms of trails, and a multi-use bridge over Veitch Creek. The northern section of the park was opened in 2017 with the completion of the Sooke Hills Wilderness Trail. To receive updates on the park's opening or to read more about what work is being done, you can check in on the [capital project page](#).