

Sharp-tailed Snake

IDENTIFICATION GUIDE

Endangered in Canada and **Red-listed** in British Columbia

The **Sharp-tailed Snake** is a small rare snake found on Vancouver Island and the Gulf Islands, British Columbia. This guide provides information on how to identify the snake and distinguish it from the more common garter snakes. All snakes found in this area are non-venomous and harmless to humans.

Sharp-tailed Snake (*Contia tenuis*)

SIZE Small and slender, worm-like; length of adults about 20–30 cm; length of young at hatching about 10 cm.

COLOUR Reddish or greyish brown; juveniles often brighter red than adults, similar to earthworms.

DISTINGUISHING FEATURES Sharp, thorn-like tail tip; black and white barring on the underside; smooth body scales; divided anal scale (see reverse side for details).

ACTIVITY Most active in late February to June and again in late September to October.

HABITS Usually hides under rocks, decaying wood, or debris; seldom seen out in the open.



Juvenile
Sharp-tailed
Snake



Adult
Sharp-tailed
Snake

Garter Snakes (*Thamnophis* species)

SPECIES IN BC Common Garter Snake (*T. sirtalis*); Western Terrestrial Garter Snake (*T. elegans*); Northwestern Garter Snake (*T. ordinoides*).

SIZE Length of adults up to about 66 cm (*T. ordinoides*), 100 cm (*T. elegans*), and 130 cm (*T. sirtalis*); young at birth about 15–20 cm long.

COLOUR Variable; often with red, yellow or orange stripes running along the sides and the mid-back on grey, brown or black background; some individuals lack stripes.

DISTINGUISHING FEATURES Body often striped; long tapering tail; keeled body scales resulting in rough texture.

ACTIVITY Most active in the spring and early summer but can be encountered any time, apart from cold periods in winter.

HABITS Often seen out in the open either sunning itself or moving through the undergrowth; shelters under rocks, decaying wood, and debris.



Northwestern
Garter Snake

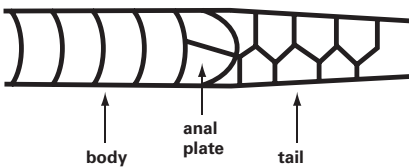


Common
Garter Snake

Identification Key

(only applicable for southwestern BC)

Features of Sharp-tailed Snakes



SIZE Is the snake less than 35 cm (1 ft) long?

YES

STRIPING Does the snake lack a narrow stripe along mid-back?

Note: Some garter snakes are uniform in colour but often retain a faint stripe along head and neck

YES

UNDERSIDE Does the underside have distinct black and white barring? Note: Some garter snakes have indistinct barring (as in photo on right).

YES

TAIL Is the tail short and does it end in a thorn-like spike?

Note: The tail of snakes has two rows of scales on the underside. The tail of garter snakes is long and tapering.

YES

BODY SCALES Are the individual body scales smooth (with no keel)?

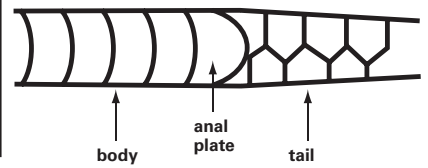
Note: The scales of garter snakes are keeled and appear rough.

YES

ANAL PLATE Is the anal plate divided into two? Note: The anal plate is the last scale before the vent or anus, on the underside of the snake. In garter snakes, this scale is undivided.

YES

Features of Garter Snakes



What you saw was most likely a **Garter Snake**.

What you saw was most likely a **Sharp-tailed Snake**.

Please take a photo, write down the date, time and other details of your observation, and report it to the **Sharp-tailed Snake Recovery Team**. (email: Sharp-tailedSnake@Victoria1.gov.bc.ca).