

# **Green Scene: Revised Amphibian Guidebook is Well-Designed and Informative**

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[Title in Tri-City News: Amphibian guidebook offers wealth of info]

Although we humans are enjoying the relaxed pace and warm weather of summer, now is crunch time for many young amphibians. As the summer heat dries up ephemeral (i.e., temporary) wetlands, it's a race against time for tadpoles to transform into adults. Amazingly, tadpoles can sense that their habitat is disappearing. If water levels are dropping, they develop faster into frogs by sprouting legs while still small. If it has been a rainy summer and there is still an abundance of water, tadpoles will take longer to metamorphose. These lucky ones will emerge from their wetlands as larger frogs more likely to survive in their new home on the moist forest floor.

While I have learned a lot about local amphibians by wading carefully through wetlands or standing in my wellies quietly watching, I also benefited by reading a terrific little guidebook, "Amphibians of Oregon, Washington and British Columbia" by Charlotte Corkran and Chris Thoms. Originally published in 1996 by Lone Pine and just recently updated and re-released, I have rarely seen a handbook as well designed and informative as this one. Most handbooks on amphibians show only photographs of adult frogs but this guidebook is replete with helpful photographs and diagrams of tadpoles and salamander larvae. Without this guidebook and its excellent keys for distinguishing egg masses and juvenile forms of various amphibian species, I would have been uncertain I had discovered red-legged frogs, a species at risk, in some of our local wetlands. This handbook also contains a description of the wetland habitats in which specific species are found, a calendar of their life cycles, information about amphibian development and a checklist of status with regard to level of endangerment.

Compared to Washington and Oregon, the amphibians of BC are fairly easy to identify as we have far fewer species than found further south. In local wetlands, we have chorusing Pacific treefrogs and, less often, red-legged frogs both of which breed in ephemeral wetlands. These species will also use permanent ponds but, there, they risk becoming meals for the hungry and much larger bullfrogs and green frogs, both introduced species. In the headwaters of streams, tadpoles of coastal tailed frogs may be found. These unusual tadpoles, which can take up to five years to metamorphose into adults, adhere to rocks in fast-moving streams using a band across the lower part of their mouth. We have only one toad species, the western toad. Apparently, Quarry Road in northeast Coquitlam can sometimes be covered with tiny toadlets migrating en masse from low-elevation wetlands to habitat higher on Burke Mountain.

Our list of local salamanders is also abbreviated. These include the common northwestern salamander, long-toed salamander and poisonous rough-skinned newt. Adult long-toed salamanders, which have a yellowish stripe down their backs, are quite terrestrial but seek out moist dark places even in buildings such as sheds. We sometimes find them in wet areas at the Noons Creek hatchery. The blackish northwestern salamanders are more commonly found in ponds even as adults. Their grapefruit-sized egg masses are readily observed in local wetlands during the spring. Roughed-skinned newts seek out larger

wetlands – I once saw one at DeBoville Slough. Their red underbelly serves as a warning of the toxin their bodies carry. We also have one species of completely terrestrial salamander, the ensatina. These tiny salamanders do not lay their eggs in water but, instead, utilize moist woody debris during the winter months. This time of year they are found only underground. Sensibly, the Corkran and Thoms guidebook contains no description of their eggs as they are so rarely found.

I was sad to learn that Chris Thoms is now deceased. The revised guidebook is dedicated to her memory as well as to “the next generation of froggers”. If you have the first edition, you won’t need to acquire this one, as the main changes are updates to taxonomic status. However, if you want to learn more about local amphibians, purchasing the revised guide would be an ideal start.