

# Celebrating Alberta's Amphibian and Reptile Species

## *A glimpse of amphibians and reptiles in Alberta*

### **Celebrating Alberta's Amphibian and Reptile Species**

This past summer, the Boreal Forest Research Centre continued its mentorship program by inviting Kris Kendell, biologist at the Alberta Conservation Association (ACA), to Peace River to give the community a glimpse of amphibians and reptiles in Alberta.

Kris Kendall is coordinator of the Alberta Volunteer Amphibian Monitoring Program (AVAMP) and the Alberta Snake Hibernaculum Inventory and Reptile-monitoring Program. He visited Peace River July 11 to help residents celebrate the sheer variety of amphibians and reptiles, particularly in Alberta.

Participants at the presentation learned about amphibians' and reptiles' astonishing array of survival strategies, lifestyles and breeding behaviors. The presentation also overviewed how this unique group of animals are affected by human impacts on their habitat and the ecosystems on which they depend. "Because of their unique biology and sensitivities to changes in their environment, amphibians act as barometers of the health of the environment," said Kris.

In Alberta, there are large gaps in knowledge about the distribution of amphibian and reptile populations. Many areas remain unstudied with respect to their populations, for example the areas surrounding and north of Peace River.

Increasing public awareness and appreciation of amphibians and reptiles found in Alberta's Peace River region can assist with the conservation of this group of animals, said Kris.

Attendees learned how they can become directly involved with the conservation of amphibians and reptiles by participating in the Alberta Volunteer Amphibian Monitoring Program (AVAMP), as well as what the Alberta Conservation Association and other agencies are doing to help conserve amphibian and reptile species in the province. The web site for becoming a volunteer for the monitoring program is at [www.ab-conservation.com/frog/monitoring](http://www.ab-conservation.com/frog/monitoring).

The hope is that presentations such as this one, that highlight the threats and limiting factors to amphibians and reptiles, could lead to a shift in land-use philosophies that benefit and conserve healthy amphibian and reptile populations, said Kris.

Through the AVAMP and Alberta Snake Hibernaculum Inventory and

Reptile-monitoring Program, the ACA acts as a centre for data and information exchange with government and non-government agencies, academic institutes and the general public to provide expert advice regarding the natural history of Alberta's reptiles and amphibians.



*Tiger Salamander: a fairly common, but secretive amphibian species found throughout much of the aspen parkland and prairie regions of Alberta. Photo courtesy of Kris Kendell*

The ACA also assists with a variety of amphibian and reptile research projects and initiatives in the province. Currently, it is involved in the recovery efforts of the northern leopard frog, working with Alberta Sustainable Resource Development and other agencies to help recover leopard frog populations in Alberta. The work includes population inventory, a DNA study, reintroduction research, habitat assessment research, outreach initiatives and land-stewardship initiatives.

To many Albertans, reptiles and amphibians are met with both familiarity and curiosity, as well as misunderstanding, says Kris. "Because reptiles and amphibians are often overlooked by society, presentations such as the one delivered in Peace River are instrumental in increasing local public awareness and knowledge of Alberta's biodiversity," he said.

The Celebrating Alberta's Amphibian and Reptile Species event in Peace River was sponsored by the Boreal Forest Research Centre, Alberta Conservation Association and Daishowa-Marubeni International Ltd.