

Biologists find snakes in Southeastern Alaska

FAIRBANKS—If you came to Alaska because "there's no snakes" up here, then a curator at the University of Alaska Museum at Fairbanks may have bad news for you.

Robert Parker Hodge concedes the snakes are "having a tough time getting established" in the 49th state, but they are here. There have been three sightings of common garter snakes by federal biologists in Southeastern Alaska.

The sightings could hardly qualify the state for a snake epidemic, and anyway Hodge says they are completely harmless. In fact, he says, there are no poisonous reptiles or amphibians in Alaska.

He said garter snakes and several Southeastern amphibians are carried into Alaska by the major rivers running from Canada. Not enough research has been conducted to know whether there is a breeding population of garter snakes in Alaska. They are limited to Southeast. Frogs, on the other hand, abound statewide.

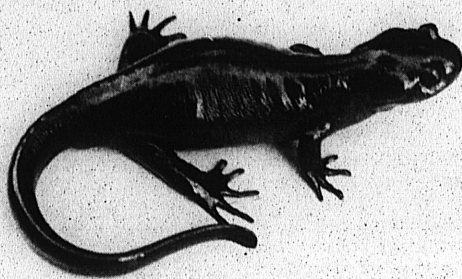
Hodge joined the museum staff last fall, coming to the Fairbanks campus from a position as curator at the Point Defiance Aquarium at Tacoma, Washington. He has also worked at the American Museum of Natural History and did consultant work for the Mass. Dept. of Wildlife and the Wash. State Game Dept.

His first love, apparently, is amphibians and reptiles. His book, "Amphibians and Reptiles in Alaska, Yukon and the Northwest Territories," published by Alaska Northwest Publishing Co., is due out in August.

There is a surprising number of amphibians in Alaska, including frogs, salamanders, newts and toads. The amphibians have a much wider distribution than the snakes.

Tadpoles should be kept in a gallon jar at least half-full of water.

Hodge notes that tadpoles are voracious eaters and need a great deal of algae and vegetable



SALAMANDER---This is a Northwestern Salamander, found in Southeastern Alaska.

The frog common to almost the entire state is the wood frog, a small brown critter found in or near temporary or permanent marshes and standing water.

For the dedicated frog hunter, Hodge provides tips on finding and keeping them from infancy to adulthood. Tadpoles, small fish-like creatures complete with gills, ultimately evolve into adult frogs.

They are easily captured by dipping an aquarium net or strainer into a swamp bottom and pouring the contents into a large container of water. When the tadpoles swim free of the swamp debris they can be caught individually with a small net.

material as food to grow properly. Adding a supply of organic matter from the swamp would probably do the trick. It takes 30-45 days for tadpoles to mature into frogs at room temperature.

They should be kept out of prolonged direct sunlight to protect them from getting "cooked" in their jar.

When they begin to show signs of changing into frogs, a piece of floating material should be placed in the water so they can crawl out onto it. Frogs breathe with lungs, like animals, and lose their gills as they mature.

Baby frogs are difficult to feed, Hodge says, and should be released in the interest of humane treatment. If you insist on keeping them, they need large quantities of live food... bugs, worms, flies, and similar delicacies.

If you keep a frog from infancy, or if you catch one as an adult, Hodge suggests it be released in the fall so it can find a suitable place to hibernate for the winter. Frogs have been known to hibernate for up to



SNAKES IN ALASKA?---This snake, held by Heather Hodge of Fairbanks, was found in Southeastern Alaska.

seven months at a stretch. To deprive them of this dormancy is to alter their natural life cycle.

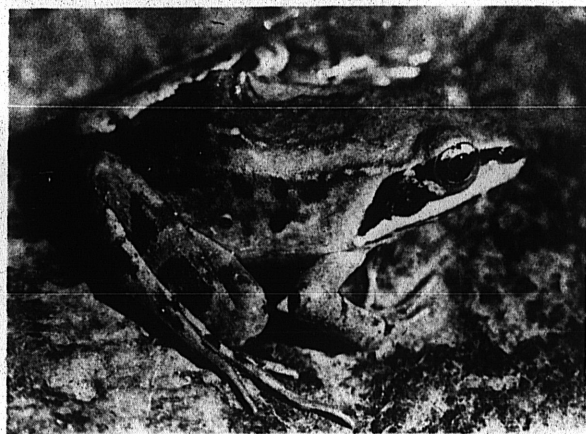
The only places in Alaska where wood frogs have not been recorded are the extreme Northwestern areas of the state, and the Aleutian Islands.

They have been recorded at Galbraith Lake just north of the Brooks Range.

There are other slithery-type creatures in Alaska that may not

as big with a salmon-colored belly. Then there is the toad.

Hodge says the toad is abundant throughout Southeast Alaska "in phenomenal numbers." The toad has long been used by Southeastern Indian tribes carved on totem poles and headdresses. Often described as a "frog totem," the toad was, says Hodge, the model for the Native carvings and images.



WOOD FROG---This critter is common throughout most of Alaska.

be readily associated with the North. The long-toed salamander is found along the Stikine and Taku rivers of Southeast Alaska and the northwestern salamander is found only on Mary Island, the farthest south island in Alaska.

The newt is widely distributed along the Southeastern Panhandle from Haines, south, are easy to find, and live in much the same environment as frogs.

Not so easy to find because of their nocturnal and secretive natures are salamanders. "The only way to find them," Hodge says, "is to look under logs, rocks and moss adjacent to standing water."

Salamanders can be raised from the larval stage just like frogs. The only difference in the process is that they must have live food throughout their lives as they are carnivorous from birth.

Southeast boasts two additional "frogs." One is the spotted frog which is similar to the wood frog but about twice

Hodge is interested in hearing from anyone who finds amphibians or reptiles in Alaska. He asks that a description of the critter be sent to him at the UA Museum. If the museum desires the specimen he will write back with information on shipping the creature to Fairbanks.

Partly in jest and partly in all seriousness Hodge has created the fictitious "Society of Alaska Worm Salamanders," with appropriate certificates to be awarded to people who have helped in surveying reptiles and amphibians in Alaska.

He says, "The certificate is suitable for framing and portrays a worm salamander in a sweater because it's cold up here."

For the would-be naturalist itching to make a discovery Hodge says "there is a possibility of an Asian family of salamanders being found in Western Alaska. It would probably be 4-5 inches long and brown in color."

If it lives in Alaska he said it would be found under rocks or logs as it is very secretive.

Native voting assistance bill

Sen. Ted Stevens has introduced a bill to provide that Alaskan Native need be given oral voting assistance only if their language is historically unwritten.

This is to correct a provision in the Voting Rights Act extension passed last summer by Congress and signed into public law.

Stevens was successful during consideration of the bill last year in having the exemption for historically unwritten Native languages put in one section of the bill, but the floor managers refused to accept an amendment for the exemption in another section.

This meant that the minority language provisions for ballots and election materials continued to apply to the Native languages.

The law provides that if more than five per cent of the voting-age citizens in a state or political subdivision are members of a single language minority, ballot materials in that area must be printed in the minority language. This applies unless the minority language is oral or unwritten, in which case only oral assistance has to be provided.

Alaskan Native languages are traditionally unwritten, although anthropologists in recent years have begun to transcribe the spoken work into written languages for the first time. Very few of those who traditionally used Native languages can read the written versions.

The Act could require that Alaska provide ballots and election materials in these traditionally unwritten languages, which virtually no one can read, causing the state a great unnecessary expense.

This could actually mean less voter assistance, Stevens pointed out in introducing the bill. A voter education pamphlet, which the state prints and distributes to all voters, would have to be published in a variety of languages other than English.

The cost of doing this would be prohibitive, Lieutenant Governor Lowell Thomas has said, and the pamphlet would have to be discontinued altogether.

Stevens said that providing oral voting assistance has been shown to be the most effective way of insuring full voting participation in Alaska.

"To require ballots and election materials in an unreadable language will cost much more and do nothing to achieve the goal of the Voting Rights Act.

Passage of my amendment will permit Alaska to continue to provide the voter assistance brochure and oral assistance to the minority language voter as it has since before enactment of the Voting Rights Act, but it will end the current requirement that ballots be printed in languages few can read," the senator said.

HUD not to cancel 400 Alaska housing units

The 400 units of low-income Native housing recently allotted to Alaska will not be canceled by the Dept. of Housing and Urban Development, HUD Secretary Carla Hills has assured U.S. Sen. Ted Stevens.

Hills explained that a recent temporary delay in funding these housing units was caused by problems in cost control and construction of 500 units now being built in Alaska which the department is trying to avoid in building the next 400 units. The delay did not constitute cancellation, she said.

Upon hearing that there was a possibility of these units being canceled, Stevens had wired Hills that if the units were not realized it would mean further housing problems where a severe housing shortage already exists.

Of the 400 units, 127 are scheduled for the North Slope area, 43 for the Kotzebue region, 200 reprogrammed from an earlier program, and 30 as yet undesignated.

"I'm glad to see that this potentially serious problem has been satisfactorily resolved with HUD's reaffirmation of their plans to provide Alaska with these essential housing units," Stevens said.



If you happen to have 13 children the odds are 8,192 to 1 that all of them will be boys!