

Snake Program Introduction

Hello students! Thankyou for welcoming me into your classroom today. My name is Luke James and I work for Wood Buffalo National Park

Raise your hand if you've visited the park before.

If you've been to places like the salt plains, the snake pits or even Pine Lake then you've been inside Wood Buffalo National Park before.

Wood Buffalo National Park is the largest National Park in Canada and it's got a lot that makes it special. We have the world's largest beaver dam, the world largest dark sky preserve, and we're home to North America's largest land mammal. The Wood Bison! However, by far, my favorite feature of Wood Buffalo is our Snakes!!!

SNAKE POLL

Wood Buffalo National Park is home to the red sided garter snakes. These lil guys have a black/green body with yellow stripes and red blotches in between. They are thankfully non venomous. In fact their teeth aren't even big enough to puncture human skin.

How big do you think these snakes can get?

A baby snake is called a neonate! - Skinny like a pencil

Juvenile! 1 – 3 years old, still fairly skinny, up to 30 cm long. No longer than a computer keyboard

Adult males grow up to 70 centimeters long

Adult females can grow up to 1 m long, almost as long as a baseball bat. If it is on the rounder side, mamma is probably getting ready for a litter of neonates!

The sub-arctic may seem like an unlikely place to find snakes.(4 clicks) in fact this population of snakes is the northernmost colony of reptiles in the world. Just 24 km from Fort Smith We're lucky that two natural regions, Karstland and Wetlands, allow a population of snakes to exist here. The snakes hibernate in the

Karstland hibernaculum for 8 months over the winter then, in the spring they emerge.

Who here has seen the snakes at the snake pit?

What kind of stuff are they up to this time of year?

By the time the snakes emerge in the spring they haven't eaten for over 8 months. Any energy they have left from hibernation goes into the 2 "M"s

Mating and Migrating. Raise your hand if you know what either of those words mean?

These snakes begin mating in the spring as soon as they emerge from hibernation. The males leave the den first and wait for the females to exit. Once the females leave the den the males surround them and form "mating balls". After the female has chosen her mate and mated, she begins her migration to the wetlands

Female snakes give birth every 2-3 years to live young. Garter snakes are unique because unlike most snakes their eggs hatch within the mother's body and young are born alive. This is an advantage for the snakes found here because of the cold temperatures. Snakes, unlike humans, are cold blooded which means that they rely on their outside environment to regulate their body temperature.

Run in the spot to generate heat - coldblooded vs warmblooded

During the summer months, the snakes will leave this area and migrate over 4 km to the wetlands where their main source of food is.

Can you guess what kind of food the snakes eat?

Frogs, toads, tadpoles, slugs, worms, insects, leeches, lizards, spiders, birds, eggs, fish and rodents. The red-sided garter snakes like other snakes swallow their food whole.

It's important that the snakes leave their winter home before the leaves grow on trees. They need the full sun for their journey to the wetlands. Once winter approaches they will make their way back to their hibernaculum for the winter and get ready to do it all over again the next year.

Do you have any more questions about the snakes in Wood Buffalo?

WOOD BUFFALO NATIONAL PARK SURVEY

Circle the answer that best describes your feelings

1 = Agree

2 = Somewhat Agree

3 = Disagree

- | | | | |
|------------------------------------------|---|---|---|
| 1. Snakes are vicious. | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| 2. Whales are more important than snakes | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| 3. Most snakes are poisonous | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| 4. Snakes eat birds | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| 5. Snakes are cute | 1 | 2 | 3 |

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