

Colorado's Amphibians & Reptiles

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As of January 2001



Colorado's Amphibians and Reptiles

Amphibians and reptiles have inhabited the earth for millions of years. Worldwide, there are over 11,000 species recognized. Despite its relatively arid and cold climate, Colorado is home to 67 native species of amphibians and reptiles, and one introduced species - the bullfrog - which has become established here in the wild.

Colorado's native amphibians and reptiles - sometimes collectively referred to as "herptiles" - are a diverse group, consisting of 1 species of salamander, 16 species of frogs and toads, 5 turtle species, 19 species of lizards, and 26 species of snakes. For several of these species there are two or more subspecies which occur in Colorado. For a complete list and detailed information about Colorado's herptiles, refer to the publication "Amphibians and Reptiles in Colorado", by Geoffrey Hammerson (1999). This book is available from many bookstores and at most Colorado Division of Wildlife offices.

Species Status

As of January, 2001, all but three of Colorado's native species or subspecies of herptiles are classified as "nongame wildlife". Three species, including the larval form of the tiger salamander, the prairie rattlesnake, and the common snapping turtle are classified as "game"

species, and are regulated under Chapters 1 (fishing) and 3 (small game) of the Colorado Wildlife Commission Regulations. Only one nongame herptile species - the boreal or mountain toad - is classified as threatened or endangered in Colorado at this time. It is listed as "endangered" by the Colorado Wildlife Commission, and is a candidate for listing under the federal Endangered Species Act.

Many of Colorado's herptile species have very limited distribution, are rare, or of unknown status. The Colorado Division of Wildlife is conducting surveys to obtain more information on the distribution and status of these species in order to better manage and conserve them for the use and enjoyment of future generations, and to try to avoid the need for future listing of any of these species as threatened or endangered.

Regulations

GAME SPECIES

Tiger Salamander (larval form)

Season: Year round.

Daily bag & possession limit:

1. The daily bag and possession limit for the gilled (larval) form of salamander is 50 animals less than 5 inches in length.
2. The possession of adult (terrestrial) tiger salamanders is limited to four animals, subject to the same provisions as apply to other herptile species listed in Chapter 10, #1000, a, 6.

License and manner of take: May be taken by fishing, by hand, traps and the use of seines and nets by any person with a valid standard or commercial Colorado fishing license.

Bullfrog

Season: Year round.

Daily bag & possession limit: Unlimited.

License and manner of take: Bullfrogs may be taken by anyone in possession of a valid Colorado fishing license by means of fishing, archery, by hand, the use of gigs, and nets. Artificial light may be used while frogging.

Snapping Turtle

Season: Statewide, from April 1 through October 31.

Daily bag & possession limit: Unlimited.

License and manner of take: Snapping turtles may be taken by anyone in possession of a valid Colorado fishing license or small game hunting license, and by any method not specifically prohibited by regulation or law.

Prairie Rattlesnake

Season: June 15 through August 15.

Daily bag & possession limit: Daily bag limit - 3, possession limit - 6.

License and manner of take: Prairie rattlesnakes may be taken by anyone in possession of a valid Colorado small game hunting license, and by any method not specifically prohibited by regulation or law.

NOTE: Colorado State Statutes provide that "any person may kill rattlesnakes when necessary to protect life or property" [33-6-107(9), C.R.S.].

NONGAME SPECIES

Nongame species and subspecies of herptiles, including threatened or endangered species are protected and their harassment, taking or possession is prohibited except as follows:

1. Under a scientific collecting license.
2. Under a rehabilitation license.
3. Under a license for zoological, educational, propagation or other special purposes.
4. Up to four individuals of each of the following species and/or subspecies of reptiles and amphibians may be taken annually and held in captivity for non-commercial purposes only, provided that no more than twelve in the aggregate may be possessed at any time:

Plain=s spadefoot	<u>Spea bombifrons</u>
Woodhouse=s toad	<u>Bufo woodhousii</u>
Western chorus frog	<u>Pseudacris triseriata</u>
Painted turtle	<u>Chrysemys picta</u>
Western box turtle	<u>Terrapena ornata</u>
Sagebrush lizard	<u>Sceloporus graciosus</u>
Tree lizard	<u>Urosaurus ornatus</u>
Side-blotched lizard	<u>Uta stansburiana</u>
Prairie & plateau lizards	<u>Sceloporus undulatus</u>
Bullsnake or gopher snake	<u>Pituophis catenifer</u>
Western terrestrial garter snake	<u>Thamnophis elegans</u>
Plains garter snake	<u>Thamnophis radix</u>
Lesser earless lizard	<u>Holbrookia maculata</u>
Western whiptail	<u>Cnemidophorus tigris</u>
Racer	<u>Coluber constrictor</u>
Western hognose snake	<u>Heterodon nasicus</u>

Such reptiles and amphibians and their progeny may only be disposed of by gift or

as authorized by the Division of Wildlife. Further, such reptiles and amphibians may be released back into the wild provided they have not come into contact with reptiles and amphibians from other geographic areas and they are released as close as possible to, but in no event further than ten miles from, their place of origin.

Any other species of native reptiles or amphibians taken from the wild and lawfully possessed prior to July 1, 1998, may continue to be held in captivity provided that written notification of the numbers and species being held was given to the Division prior to July 1, 1998.

UNREGULATED SPECIES

There are numerous non-native species of herptiles which are used for pet and hobby purposes, and which are native to tropical and sub-tropical areas of the world. Whereas most of these species are highly unlikely to establish themselves in the wild if accidentally or intentionally released in Colorado, the Colorado Wildlife Commission has classified many of them as "unregulated" [Wildlife Commission Regulations, Chapter 11, #1103, B] meaning they may be imported sold, bartered, traded, transferred, possessed, propagated, and transported in Colorado, provided that all importation, disease requirements and any other state, local or federal requirements are met.

Unregulated species include:

1. All non-native sub-tropical and tropical species of snakes, lizards, turtles, frogs, salamanders, and newts.
2. The red-eared slider (*Trachemys scripta*).
3. Leopard frogs (*Rana pipiens*) and tiger salamanders (*Ambystoma tigrinum*) acquired from a lawful out-of-state source or instate producer.
4. Caimens.

PROHIBITED SPECIES

There are certain non-native species which are considered to be potentially very harmful to native wildlife and ecosystems if introduced to the state, and their importation, transportation, stocking, sale, acquisition or possession is prohibited [Wildlife Commission Regulations, Chapter 0, Article VIII, #008]. As of January, 2001, the only herptile species listed as "prohibited" is the green frog (*Rana clamitans*).

PURPOSE OF REGULATIONS

Why do we have regulations restricting the take and possession of herptile species in Colorado? There are several reasons:

1. Some species are rare or very restricted in distribution, or their status is uncertain, and

- unlimited or excessive take from the wild could significantly impact their populations and chance of long-term survival.
2. Unrestricted translocation via importation or relocation of animals from one geographic area to another could introduce disease-causing organisms to wild populations that are not adapted to resist these diseases or parasites, leading to decimation or extermination of local native species.
 3. Unrestricted translocation or captive propagation could lead to genetic "contamination" of wild populations through cross-breeding and introduction of deleterious (harmful) genetic material to wild populations. This can not only weaken wild native populations, but could make future recovery of species which become endangered much more difficult.
 4. Unrestricted transportation of certain species from one geographic area to another can lead to introduction of species which will compete with, and sometimes eliminate, local native species. The introduction of the bullfrog is believed to be a major factor in the decline of native leopard frogs, as it outcompetes and preys on the native frogs.

HOW CAN YOU HELP?

Efforts to conserve our native amphibians and reptiles will only be successful with the support, understanding and help of the people who live in and visit our state. You, as a private citizen of the state of Colorado, can do several things to help in this effort:

Become more informed about our native herptiles, and wildlife in general, to better appreciate the value of these species and what needs to be done to conserve them.

Familiarize yourself with the laws and regulations that govern the use and possession of amphibians and reptiles, and obey those regulations.

Never release herptiles, or any animals, to the wild without specific authorization from the Division of Wildlife.

Don't acquire herptiles as pets, or for hobby purposes, unless you know how to properly care for them, and that you are getting them from a legal source.

Don't kill snakes just because they're snakes! Most snakes are harmless to people, and play an important role in their native ecosystems.

WHERE TO GET MORE INFORMATION

For additional information on amphibians and reptiles, or any wildlife species, and the regulations that govern their use, please contact one of the following Division of Wildlife offices, or your local CDOW office or Wildlife Conservation Officer:

DOW Denver Service Center
6060 Broadway
Denver, CO 80216
(303) 291-7227

DOW SE Region Service Center
2126 N. Weber Street
Colorado Springs, CO 80907
(719) 227-5200

DOW NE Region Service Center
317 W. Prospect Street
Ft. Collins, CO 80526
(970) 472-4300

DOW West Region Service Center
711 Independent Avenue
Grand Junction, CO 81505
(970) 255-6100