

Native Prairie Speaker Series

Presentation: Large river valleys are essential for rare snakes in Saskatchewan.

Speaker: Ray Poulin, Royal Saskatchewan Museum

Presentation Summary:

The presence of large-bodied snakes such as Bullsnares, Yellow-bellied Racers, and Rattlesnakes in Saskatchewan appears to be completely dependent on major river valleys. Since 2007, our research group has been studying habitat use, movements, and population genetics of these rare snakes and in that time, we have not discovered or received a single report of a hibernaculum located outside a river valley system. Furthermore, records of these snakes in the province show that nearly all observations have been within proximity to a valley system. In addition, of the 35 Bullsnares we radio-tracked among 3 large river valley systems, none spent time in the upland areas outside the valley. Moreover, the genetic population structure of the Bullsnares from the 3 river valleys showed that the snakes from each valley were genetically differentiated. Thus, it appears that these snakes are so strongly linked to valleys that upland habitat may serve as a barrier to dispersal and gene flow.

Biography:

Ray Poulin is the head of research and collections and the curator of vertebrate zoology at the Royal Saskatchewan Museum, and have been at the museum since 2007. He has been studying snakes in Canada since 1992. He has studied several species at risk in Saskatchewan, especially burrowing owls, but also small mammals (mice, voles, shrews), nighthawks, and painted turtles.

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