



First Confirmed Record of Northern Rubber Boa (*Charina bottae*) for Coastal Islands of British Columbia

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The Northern Rubber Boa (*Charina bottae*) is widely distributed throughout a large portion of the western United States and reaches the northern limit of its range in southern British Columbia and possibly extreme southwestern Alberta (Russell and Bauer 2000). The species is rarely encountered because of its primarily nocturnal habits and preference for cover when on the surface.

In British Columbia, the Northern Rubber Boa is found across the southern interior of the province from the Lower Mainland east to Canal Flats and Radium Hot Springs and north through the Cariboo region to the vicinity of Quesnel (Gregory and Campbell 1984; Matsuda et al. 2006). There are no confirmed records for coastal islands although a single early record for Vancouver Island was considered of “doubtful validity” by Gregory and Campbell (1984) and Matsuda et al. (2006).

In 2009, my daughters and I had two encounters with the Northern Rubber Boa on the southwest corner of Nelson Island (49°40' 16.36" N, 124° 12' 14.76" W) northwest of Sechelt in coastal southwestern British Columbia. The large island is isolated from the mainland by Hotham Sound, Agamemnon Channel, and Malaspina Strait. Nelson Island is mostly forested and has supported small logging operations and granite quarries. The human population is small and today summer cottages have replaced old homesteads.

In mid-May, 2009, we discovered a dead rubber boa (Figure 1 a, b) lying in the middle of a gravel road to our property near Cape Cockburn (UTM 10 413308E 5502815N). The habitat is characterized by a fairly dry area of lodgepole pines (*Pinus contorta*) with adjacent forest debris and understory of salal (*Gaultheria shallon*) (Figure 2 and 3). Elevation is

39 m. After photographing the snake, we moved the carcass to the edge of the forest. In early August, 2009, we again noticed a rubber boa on the road but when we stopped to examine it, the snake moved quickly into the adjacent salal brush and disappeared.



Figure 1. Dorsal (a) and ventral (b) surface of Northern Rubber Boa found dead on a shaded forest road near Cape Cockburn, southwest Nelson Island, BC. Photo by Margaret Pearson, mid-May 2009. BC Photo 3739a.

A colour photograph of the Northern Rubber Boa was sent to Tony Greenfield who passed it on to Wayne Campbell for the provincial photo-record file (see Campbell and Stirling 1971).

This discovery of Northern Rubber Boa is of special significance because it appears that Nelson Island supports the only confirmed insular population of this secretive snake in the province. Although human activity is minimal in the vicinity of Cape Cockburn, brush-clearing in a nearby hydro transmission corridor may impact habitat requirements for this rare species. 🐍



Figure 2. Shaded gravel road in lodgepole pine habitat where Northern Rubber Boa was lying. *Photo by Margaret Pearson, Nelson Island, BC, May 2009. BC Photo 3739b.*



Figure 3. Coarse woody debris with scattered boulders and small open spaces of plant litter is typical habitat frequented by Northern Rubber Boa on southwestern Nelson Island, BC. *Photo by Margaret Pearson, May 2009. BC Photo 3739c.*

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About the author



Margaret is a retired senior. She has a master of education degree and spent her career operating a large childcare centre in Davis Bay on the Sunshine Coast. For more than 20 years Margaret spent her summers on Nelson Island, at Cape Cockburn, in an old log home built by Harry Roberts who homesteaded the area in the 1930s. She is presently trying to get the home declared a Historical Site with protection as parkland.