

Community Voices

NATURAL PERSPECTIVE — THE SNAKES IN YOUR GRASS



By EMILY J. UHRIG, Ph.D.
Special to Siuslaw News

The sun may be out, but it's no time for picnics, beach parties or other group activities.

Thanks to COVID-19, it's

still best to stay home as much as possible. Gardening is a great way of keeping busy, and you're likely to encounter wildlife while you're at it.

While birds and butterflies are welcomed into gardens, other animals are considered undesirable trespassers. Garter snakes are among those unfairly labeled with such a negative reputation.

Sometimes erroneously called 'garden' or 'guarder' snakes, their correct name is likely a reference to their resemblance to garters, the thin bands worn to prevent sagging stockings.

Oregon has several native garter snake species. Most local garter snakes are brown or greenish, possibly with yellow or red stripes. However, they're found in a variety of colors, and even individuals of the same species can look very different.

Garter snakes aren't venomous to humans and are unlikely to bite unless harassed. Far from being a threat or a pest, having a garter snake in your garden can be beneficial, since they eat slugs and snails, or even small rodents.

Like all reptiles, garter snakes are ectotherms,

meaning they rely on the sun for warmth rather than generating their own body heat.

During winter, they hibernate in sheltered locations, like rock piles or rodent burrows. Sometimes snakes hibernate together. In Canada, just one den can hold over 30,000 snakes.

In Oregon, snakes hibernate in much smaller numbers. When temperatures rise, snakes emerge to bask in the sun and go about their lives.

Like many animals, garter snakes breed in the spring. To attract mates, females produce chemicals

that act as a pheromone. The pheromone's composition reflects female length, body condition and other characteristics.

With a flick of the tongue, a male samples the female's pheromone to determine whether to mate. A skinny female, for instance, may be less healthy and less likely to produce the best offspring.

After mating, males and females go their separate ways. In the summer, females have as many as 20 to 30 offspring, which are born live rather than hatching from eggs.

No parental care is pro-

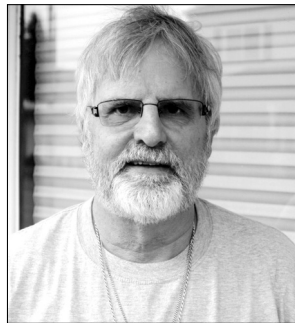
vided.

Newborn snakes are entirely self-sufficient—an impressive accomplishment for critters no larger than earthworms.

So, if you're escaping cabin fever via yard work, look out for garter snakes. Many have met their demise under a mower or hoe.

Even if you don't consider garter snakes as pretty or as charismatic as birds or butterflies, they're nonetheless interesting, harmless little animals that can help reduce the number of actual pests in your garden.

LIFE WITH MS — Exacerbation = Exasperation



By LLOYD LITTLE
Special to Siuslaw News

Whenever a situation or an illness worsens we call that an exacerbation.

Exacerbations are common occurrences for Relapsing Remitting Multiple Sclerosis (MS) warriors. Just when you have physically and mentally adjusted to your current symptoms — WHAM! It attacks you.

These increased symptoms may last any length of time. The National Multiple Sclerosis Society (NMSS) has determined through that in order for an attack to be qualified as an "exacerbation," it must either 1) occur at least 30 days from an earlier flare up or 2) last for at least 24 hours.

All I know is that, once I have become desensitized to my current symptoms, I need to adjust mentally to any new attacks with a determination to work through it until they subside in their intensity.

Treating the symptoms may or may not reduce the time and intensity of new MS symptoms. It is

that "may or may not" that resulted in my decision to fight my MS without specific MS drugs. I take the nerve pain medication gabapentin twice or more daily. And that's it.

Once again, according to the NMSS there are two triggers to the onset of an exacerbation. Research has shown stress and infections can bring about exacerbations in MS warriors.

I say the NMSS has dropped the ball with these common causes. These triggers can and do exacerbate MS, but also nearly every negative human health condition.

Treating MS may reduce the severity or length of an exacerbation but MS

exacerbations will still occur. Sometimes my mobility gets knocked off kilter with an exacerbation but I fight through it with the same determination I used as an athlete at Warrenton High School and Pacific University; we were rarely the favored teams, so it took a strong will to keep fighting against lopsided scores.

I may have MS but MS does not have me.

My hope, and the hope of other MS warriors, is a breakthrough in the research for the regeneration of myelin.

If myelin can be regenerated in our bodies, we may be able to regain much of our lost mobility.

FEATURED HOME OF THE WEEK

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