

# IT'S ALL NEW TO ME: A SELF-GUIDED ORIENTATION TO AMPHIBIANS OF THE YUBA

Hi there!



My name is Shannon Hedge and I love herps. You may be wondering what the term "herps" means. Well, "herp" is a nickname many herpers (like myself) affectionately call reptiles and amphibians, or herpetofauna if you want to get technical.

Here in Nevada County, we have many unique herps just at the tips of our toes, if only we can remember to get down and dirty and think like a salamander! This orientation is meant to get you started with herping locally during the Wild & Scenic Film Festival this January, which means we're on the hunt for amphibians. Follow along below to learn more about the amphibians of the Yuba River Watershed and where you can see them in action.

# FROGS OF THE YUBA



Photo Credit: Spencer Riffle

## Sierran Chorus Frog

- Sierran Chorus Frogs are the most common frog found in the Yuba River Watershed. While they come in a variety of colors and patterns, they are most easily identified by the dark stripe crossing through their eyeline and the presence of toepads on their feet. These frogs are pond breeders and are easiest to find near water during breeding season from November to July.

Foothill Yellow-Legged Frogs are a threatened species in this region. They can be identified by their long legs and lack of ridges across their backs. These frogs are more easily found near streams and rivers after the winter runoff has slowed, but if you're lucky you might see one moseying about near creeks during the winter.

## Foothill Yellow-Legged Frog



Photo Credit: Ethan Sneer

## Western Toad

- Western Toads, sometimes called by their subspecies name California Toads, are the only toads found in the Yuba River Watershed. Toads are distinct from frogs by their warty skin and stubby legs, the latter of which gives them the tendency to walk or hop rather than jump long distances. After snowmelt, they can be found at the edge of ponds. During particularly cold days they hunker down in burrows.



Photo Credit: Ethan Sneer

# SALAMANDERS OF THE YUBA

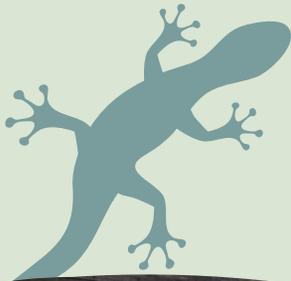


Photo Credit: Ethan Snee

## Sierra Nevada Ensatina

Sierra Nevada Ensatinas are the only salamanders in this region in the family Plethodontidae, members of which lack lungs and breathe solely through their skin. They can be identified by the brightly colored markings (normally orange or yellow) at the base of the legs and the rounded tail with a constricted base. These salamanders are entirely terrestrial and are found most easily during the rainy season in moist conifer or hardwood forests under rocks or logs.

While all amphibians are at least mildly toxic, Sierra Newts are the most toxic amphibian in the Yuba River Watershed. They secrete a powerful neurotoxin called tetrodotoxin which can enter the body through ingestion or contact with open cuts. They are distinguished from other salamanders by having a dark coloration on the top side of their body and bright coloration on their underside. Sierra Newts begin migrating to breeding streams in January and can be seen near streams and creeks until about May.

## Sierra Newt



Photo Credit: SYRCL

# TIPS AND TRICKS FOR FINDING AMPHIBIANS

1

## Brave the rain

Amphibians need to keep their skin moist, so they tend to travel the most when it is actively raining.

2

## Take a night hike

Most amphibians are nocturnal, as this is the most humid time of day in California. Make sure to bring a light source and a buddy with you.

3

## Use your ears

Frogs call during breeding season to attract a mate. Sometimes the easiest way to find them is to follow your ears.

4

## Keep your eyes on the ground

The amphibians of the Yuba are all ground dwellers, so get on their level and think like a salamander!

# BEST AMPHIBIAN HIKES AROUND THE YUBA RIVER WATERSHED

The locations listed below are merely suggestions of a few good amphibian viewing sites. This is not an exhaustive list, so feel free to take the information you gleaned from this to any hike you go on in the Yuba River Watershed.

## Hirschman Trail

Although the trail is 2.4 miles in total length, you only need to travel for 0.5 miles from the Cement Hill Trailhead near the Nevada County Government Center (off of Hwy 49) to get to Hirschman Pond and the surrounding pools. The smaller pools are prime breeding sites for Sierran Chorus Frogs, which will be calling loudly at this time of year. If you're lucky, you might spot some freshly laid frog eggs in the water!

## Yuba Goldfields

The Yuba Goldfields are located off of Hwy 20 and can be accessed via Parks Bar. While primarily designed to show the history of the area and current salmon restoration efforts, it also doubles as great frog habitat. Sierran Chorus Frogs hang out in the pools alongside the river, and on sunny days Foothill Yellow-Legged Frogs can be viewed basking along the banks. Be mindful to check Yuba flows before you go as they can be high at this time of year.

## Empire Mine SHP

While there are no water features at Empire Mine State Historic Park, it remains a good spot for finding terrestrial Sierra Nevada Ensatina. The park has many trails within the complex, but more forested trails, such as the Hardrock Trail, will be your best bet. Check in burrows or near logs for these salamanders during a dry day, or look along the trail for Ensatinas trotting along during a rainy night.

## Buttermilk Bend

The Buttermilk Bend trail is a gentle trail that follows the South Yuba River and is most known for its showy wildflower displays in the spring. The trail crosses over a tributary to the river, French Corral Creek, in which Sierra Newts have been spotted nearby. Keep an eye out along the trail for newts on the move or in pools in the creek where the newts gather for breeding

**GOOD LUCK AND HAPPY HERPING!**



Photo Credit: Liz Essig