



Reptile & Amphibian Residents of the Nature Center

Sprite the Garter Snake



Personal History:

Sprite was donated to the Nature Center in February of 1996. Sprite's mother was given to a local teacher for her classroom. Unknown to the teacher, Sprite was pregnant and delivered live baby garter snakes in the classroom. Garter snakes are ovoviviparous, which means the eggs are carried inside the mother until they hatch and are born alive. After Sprite and the other baby snakes were born, the teacher had to find homes for them because it is illegal to release captive-born snakes into the wild. Sprite helps teach children at the Nature Center about reptiles.

Natural History: Garter Snake (*Thamnophis sirtalis*)

Description: The common garter snake may be black, gray or dark brown, with a distinct cream-colored stripe down the middle of its back, extending from the head. The sides have red splotches. They may be 24-28" long with a slender body and a tail which tapers to a sharp tip.

Habitat: They are usually found living along ponds and streams and most swim readily. They may be found in the foothills along the length of the Sierra Nevada.

Food: The common garter snake lives near water because it eats both land and water animals. They eat small rodents, birds, lizards, frogs, tadpoles, fish and salamanders. They are one of the few predators that can eat Pacific newts without being poisoned.

Communications: If handled they often discharge foul smelling fluid from anal scent glands. When cornered it will inflate its body, exhibiting red markings along its sides to alarm predators. Its bite is not poisonous.

Reproduction: Odors are produced by both the male and female to attract mates. Mating occurs in spring. The eggs are retained within the female and young are born live. About 10-25 young, approximately 7-10" long, are born in late summer.

