

Toadlet crossing ahead

Conservation crew protects babies during migration

By Evan Duggan, Vancouver Sun August 6, 2011



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Tens of thousands of pebblesized baby toads have been flooding across a pair of Chilliwack roads all week, seeking their new home.

No larger than a thumbnail, the toadlets are migrating from their wetland origins near Ryder Lake to the surrounding forest.

It's a dangerous journey for the Western toads, said Lisa Fox of the Fraser Valley Conservancy, an organization that acquires and protects ecologically sensitive lands, which is helping with the weeklong migration.

A crew has been on hand to control traffic and maintain a safe route for the expected 800,000 baby amphibians that will cross Ryder Lake and Elk View roads.

The toad traffic was expected to peak Friday, Fox said, with possibly "tens of thousands" making the journey in just one day.

The main problem facing the Western toad is "fragmented habitat," and "impacts" on the road, she said. Only one per cent of these young toads will reach adulthood, Fox said, adding that toadlet road-crossings are common at this time of year throughout all of B.C.

"When they're frightened they roll over or they freeze," Fox said. "We don't want to see them squished on the road." Western toads are considered a species of conservation concern.

At any given point during the day, 30 per cent of the crossing section could be covered in amphibians, she said.

Fox said the organization is saving for open-topped toad tunnels, which can be laid under the road to allow for mass migrations. The tunnels are protected from traffic with grated tops, like a cattle guard, she said.

Each one costs about \$8,000 and Fox estimates they'll need about a half dozen for the Ryder Lake region.

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