

TURTLES, SNAKES AND SALAMANDERS OF EAST-CENTRAL SASKATCHEWAN

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A telephone call from Mac Chimko of Chelan about a salamander in the snow aroused my scientific curiosity about turtles, snakes and salamanders in the area. This article is the result of information gained through personal communication.

Upon arriving at Mac's place I found that they had the salamander in a box in the house and they already had a name for it — "Sally." The grandchildren had found it wandering around in the snow on the afternoon of 20 October 1991. Mac back-tracked it down the hill from the

farmyard. At one point the salamander had gone into a Thirteen-lined Ground Squirrel's hole and out again. It seemed that this disoriented amphibian was looking for a place under the ground to hibernate. Back-tracking down to a slough at the bottom of the hill, Mac found that the salamander had travelled across about 70 m of snow.

On the night of 16 October, eight cm of snow fell. The ground under the snow was warm and not frozen as the weather had been very mild a few days earlier. The warmth of the



Gray Tiger Salamander in the snow near Chelan

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ground was melting the snow from beneath and the freezing temperature was sealing in the surface of the ground with a crust of icy snow, which made it difficult for the salamander to get back under the ground.

Turtles, snakes and salamanders are generally uncommonly encountered in the southern part of the boreal forest. Many people in the Hudson Bay area have never seen even one of these in a lifetime. There are cases where specimens of turtles, snakes and salamanders are introduced, imported from other parts of the province when people capture them as pets and later release them or allow them to escape. Pet turtles native to the southern United States probably cannot survive Saskatchewan winters outdoors.

The Gray Tiger Salamander (*Ambystoma tigrinum diaboli*) ranges in eastern Saskatchewan north to Lady Lake, Lintlaw, and Gronlid.³ It is also reported as regular at McKague and larva have been seen near Barrier Lake by Alvin Hill and at Greenwater Lake Provincial Park by Wayne Harris and Sheila Lamont in 1983.⁵ This species is very rare from Greenwater Provincial Park northward.

Tiger Salamander Sightings Northeast of Greenwater Provincial Park (Figure 1)

Erwood – a few were seen in a clay bank east of town by Alex Rendek about 1966.

Hudson Bay – one crossed the highway eight km east of town in 1991 and was seen by Wayne Harris of Raymore.

Porcupine Plain – one found in the school basement by a student was brought to the teacher Margaret

Ashdown (later Hooper) prior to 1960.

The Western Painted Turtle (*Chrysemys picta belli*) is reported as common in Saskatchewan in the Qu'Appelle and Souris River systems.³ The range map given by Francis R. Cook in 1984 shows it extending northward to near Canora and in Manitoba from Winnipeg northwestward to north of The Pas.⁴ The following turtle sightings will help to fill in the gap between The Pas and Canora.

Turtle Sightings North of Canora (Figure 1)

Bjorkdale – Joe Kehrig saw one turtle about 10 cm across near town about 1975.

Chelan – a large turtle was found along the Greenwater Creek near town in about 1966 by Bruce Kistner. He said that it was big enough to stand on. [Editor's note: This is an unusual way of describing size, but may suggest that the animal was too big to be a Western Painted Turtle.]

Erwood – one was seen at a farm dugout by Gerald Coates for about three summers until 1982.

Greenwater Lake – park naturalist Jane Gallagher reported sighting one turtle in July 1990.

High Tor – Don Gabriel tells of one turtle that was found in the area and brought to the school in about 1953.

High Tor – one seen by Jerry Dutcyvich about 1968.

Hudson Bay – conservation officer Gary Harrison saw a turtle cross the highway east of town in June 1981.

Kinloch – north of town a turtle together with several smaller turtles was seen prior to 1968 by Odd Steiestol.

Western Painted Turtle

- ▲ - verified by photograph
- △ - unverified sighting

Gray Tiger Salamander

- ⊗ - verified by specimen or photo
- - unverified sighting

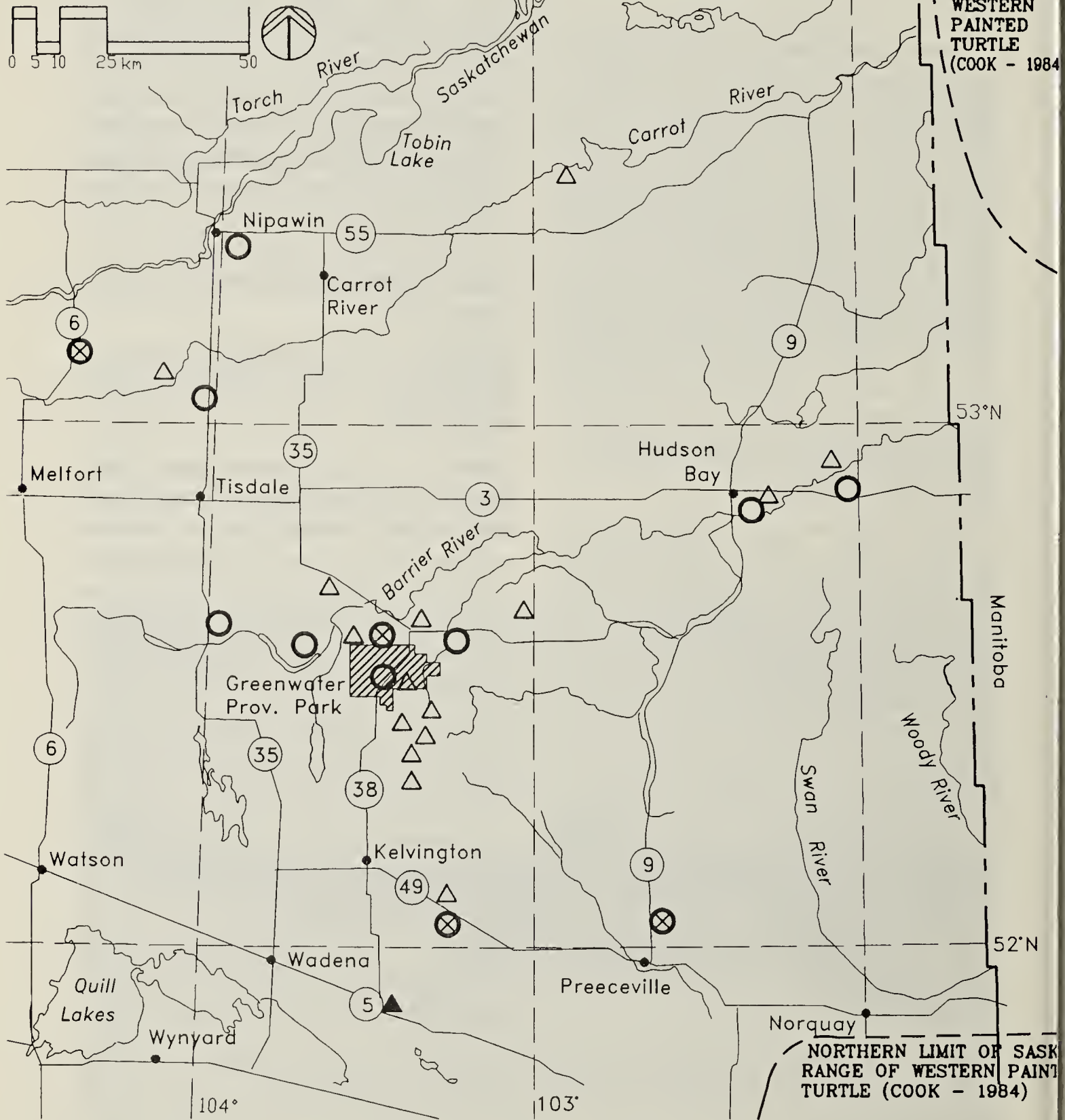


Figure 1. Sightings of turtles and salamanders in east-central Saskatchewan.

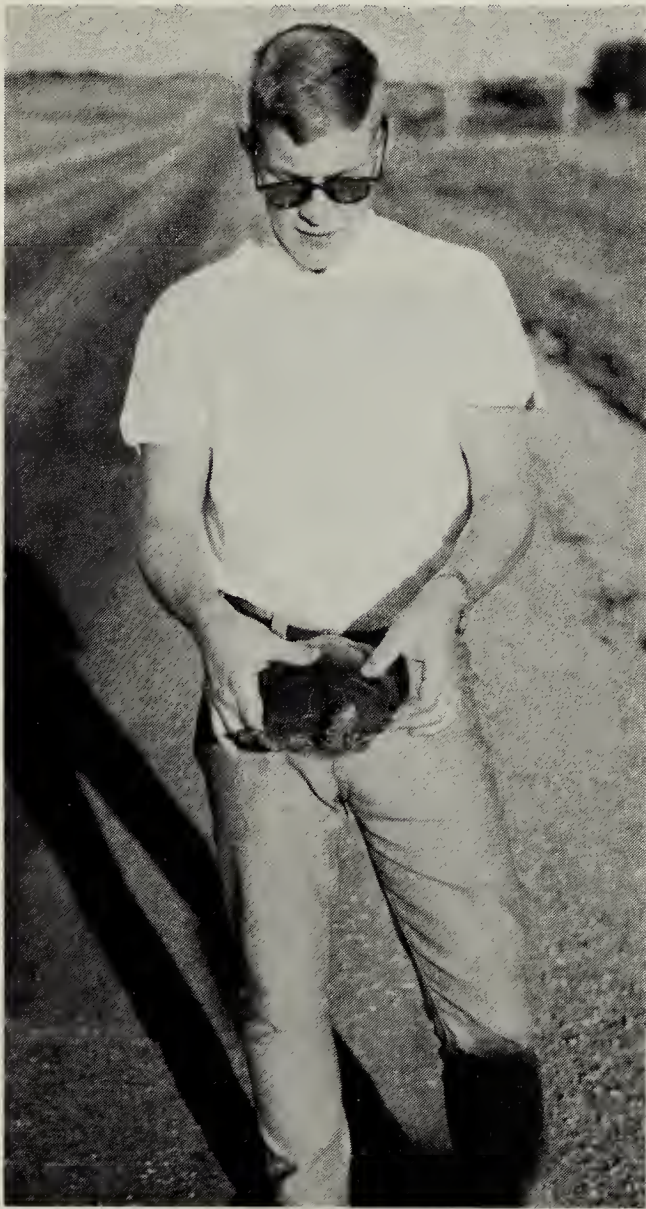
Kinloch – Mike Kryzanowski saw a large turtle cross the grid road east of town in August or September 1990.

Kuroki – one found along the highway by Jerry Dutcyvich and Rodge Bolton in July 1966. This record is verified by photograph.

Lintlaw – a turtle was seen at a farm dugout and was reported to Marguerite Sloan prior to 1985.

Marean Lake – a large turtle was found by Caroline Kewley in a farmyard north of Marean Lake in 1979. It probably came from a nearby pond. Caroline said that it compared well to a picture that she had of a painted turtle.

Marean Lake – Caroline Kewley's



Roger Bolton holds a Western Painted Turtle near Kuroki
Jerry Dutcyvich

daughter Melody Paik found a large turtle in the same yard as above in August 1991. This specimen was taken to show others of her family and was later released in the Red Deer River near Bjorkdale.

Red Earth Indian Reserve – a sighting of one along the Carrot River prior to 1975 was reported to Ronald Hooper by a resident of the Reserve.

Ridgedale – one was found along the Carrot River by Harvey McRae in the 1940s.

Round Lake (near Kinloch) – a small turtle was seen near the southeast lakeshore by Jerry Dutcyvich about 1964.

Somme – One was found at a farm dugout north of town for two years and was last seen by George Martin about 1984.

The Western Plains Garter Snake (*Thamnophis radix haydeni*) was reported as locally abundant at Lady Lake by Donald Buckle in 1964. Several specimens were collected and sent to the National Museum in Ottawa.¹ Garter snakes are reported as common at Kelvington but they are uncommon to rare northward. Two specimens of Plains Garter Snake were found near Porcupine Plain in the late 1960s. These were preserved in alcohol by Don Gabriel at the Porcupine elementary school. One was donated to the Saskatchewan Museum of Natural History in January 1992 and it was verified as being a Plains Garter Snake.

Francis R. Cook states that the Plains Garter Snake inhabits the grassland and aspen parkland but does not invade the coniferous forest.⁴ Garter snakes are seen occasionally between Porcupine Plain and Cumberland House but specimens have not been identified. The Plains Garter Snake has black bars on lips and lateral stripe is on scale rows three and four.

Garter Snake Sightings between Porcupine Plains and Cumberland House (Figure 2)

Codette – one was seen west of town about 1985 by Glen Dobson.

Hudson Bay – Pete Welygan saw a snake and several smaller ones cross the highway east of town about 1986.

Hudson Bay – one was seen in the Red Deer River south of town about 1986 by Ed Tchorzewski.

Smokey Burn (northeast of Carrot River) – one was seen in September 1991 by Wilfred Trites and reported by Frank Armstrong.

The Red-Sided Garter Snake (*Thamnophis sirtalis parietalis*) is found on the Precambrian rocks at Amisk Lake and is also reported from Cumberland Lake.³ This species is rare in southern Saskatchewan. It has been reported from near Estevan, the Qu'Appelle Valley and the Cypress Hills.³ On the red-sided the lateral stripe

is on scale rows two and three.

Donald Hooper saw a large number of snakes on the rocks along the Sturgeon-weir River near Sturgeon Landing on 25 June 1985. These were probably red-sided.

1. BUCKLE, D.J. 1965. The amphibians and reptiles of Lady Lake area, Saskatchewan. *Canadian Field-Naturalist* 79:134-136.
2. CONANT, R. 1975. Reptiles and amphibians of Eastern and Central North America. Peterson Field Guide Series, Houghton-Mifflin, Boston. xviii + 429 pp.
3. COOK, F.R. 1978. Amphibians and reptiles of Saskatchewan. Museum of Natural History, Saskatchewan Culture and Youth. 28 pp.
4. ——. 1984. Introduction to Canadian amphibians and reptiles. National Museum of Natural Sciences, Ottawa. 200 pp.
5. HARRIS, W. C., S. M. LAMONT, and C. I. G. ADAM 1984. Greenwater Provincial Park resource inventory and analysis. Unpub. report. 190 pp.



Western Plains Garter Snake at Punnichy

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Plains Garter Snake

■ -verified by specimen

Garter Snake spp.

⊠ -unverified sighting

Red-sided Garter Snake

□ -verified sighting

◻ -unverified sighting

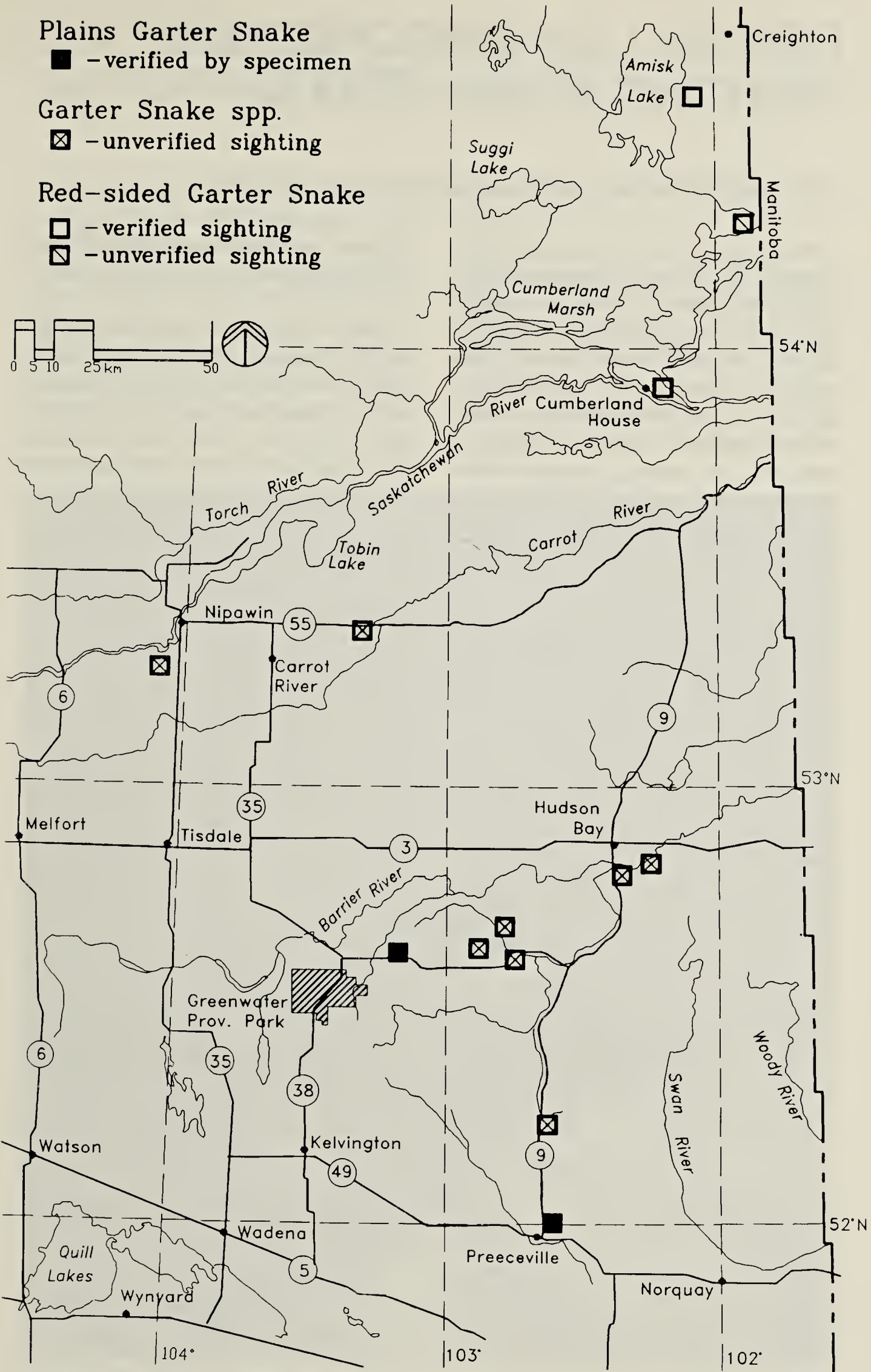


Figure 2. Sightings of snakes in east-central Saskatchewan.