

The 'Cobra' in the Woodpile

Cottaging in the Highlands has given our family many wonderful 'nature moments'. A highlight has to be the 'cobra' we discovered in the woodpile.

At the edge of the tarp covering the wood, I noticed a coiled snake sporting an attractive patch pattern along his grey-brown scales. But all attraction ended when the snake raised its head, flattened it and hissed. I wondered what sort of idiot lets a cobra loose in cottage country. Especially a piggy-nosed ugly cobra.

That piggy nose saved that snake from any overreaction on my part. There was something non-cobra-like about this snake and I backed away to let it disappear. Hooray for Google, because back home I was able to sort out that our visitor was no cobra. Rather, he was an Eastern Hog-nosed snake. I was excited - a species at-risk! I read all I could about our guest and discovered our snake is an accomplished actor with a terrific defence mechanism.

Eastern Hog-nosed snakes fake cobra. If the hissing and head-flattening doesn't work, they might lunge at you but instead of sinking their teeth in, they butt you, mouth closed. And if THAT doesn't work, they fake death and flop onto their backs.

Eastern Hog-nosed snakes are a threatened species. One of their biggest threats is people who overreact and think they pose a danger.

Sadly, we only saw our snake one more time the following year. I now know that the Haliburton Highlands Land Trust keeps a record of Species At Risk sightings and we could have reported our Eastern Hog-nosed snake. So I'm keeping a careful eye out at the woodpile.

Ruth E. Walker is an award-winning Ontario writer and has a cabin tucked between the Burnt and Drag Rivers in Haliburton. She is an active member of the Haliburton Highlands Land Trust.

The Haliburton Highlands Land Trust is a non-profit, non-governmental, registered environmental charity. Its mission is to protect the natural heritage of Haliburton County for future generations. For more information on the Land Trust, and Species at Risk, visit www.haliburtonlandtrust.ca or call 705-454-8107.

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