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Note

First verified sighting of a Western Fence Lizard (*Sceloporus occidentalis*) in British Columbia, Canada

Ron Farrell[1], Gavin Hanke[2,*], and David Veljacic[3]

[1]5568 – 181A Street, Surrey, British Columbia V3S 7Z2 Canada
[2]Royal British Columbia Museum, 675 Belleville Street, Victoria, British Columbia V8W 9W2 Canada
[3]3536 Departure Bay Road, Nanaimo, British Columbia V9T 1C1 Canada
[*]Corresponding author: ghanke@royalbcmuseum.bc.ca

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Abstract

Western Fence Lizard (*Sceloporus occidentalis*) is known from Baja California, Mexico, north to north-central Washington State, including Puget Sound, where scattered populations extend from the Cherry Point area south to Tacoma and along the west side of Puget Sound to Port Townsend. On 6 June 2020, a single juvenile *S. occidentalis* was photographed in a Cloverdale area garden, Surrey, British Columbia, representing the first verified sighting of this species in Canada. No other *S. occidentalis* were sighted in the area, and we could not determine how the specimen entered the province.

Key words: British Columbia; first sighting; Western Fence Lizard; *Sceloporus occidentalis*

Western Fence Lizard (*Sceloporus occidentalis*) is known from several islands off Baja California, Mexico, and California, USA, and on the North American continent from northern Baja California through California, Nevada, western Utah, Idaho, Oregon, and Washington (Storm *et al.* 1995; St. John 2002; Stebbins and McGinnis 2018). An isolated observation of one *S. occidentalis* in Rosebud County, and eight reports in Sanders County, Montana, represent introduced lizards (Anonymous 2020). Davis and Verbeek (1972) noted that *S. occidentalis* frequented coastal localities throughout the species' latitudinal range, including east and west sides of Puget Sound, Washington, where it is found on log-littered shorelines. Brown (1992) introduced *S. occidentalis* in Puget Sound beyond its native range, and, as noted by Kraus (2009), the four experimental translocations from just north of Everett, Washington, to Clayton Beach (in 1986 and again in 1990), Oyster Creek (in 1990), and Cherry Point (also in 1990) resulted in breeding populations. On the west side of Puget Sound, *S. occidentalis* ranges north to Port Townsend (Stebbins and McGinnis 2018). Owen (1940) also mentioned that *S. occidentalis* occurred in the Cape Flattery area, Clallam County, Washington, although this location is not included in recent field guides and the population may not persist today. Given its proximity to the Canadian border, Matsuda *et al*. (2006) listed *S. occidentalis* as a potential immigrant, and, here, we document the first sighting of *S. occidentalis* in British Columbia.

A single juvenile *S. occidentalis* (Figure 1) was photographed by R.F. on 6 June 2020, at 1150, 49.103868°N, 122.719329°W, in the Cloverdale area

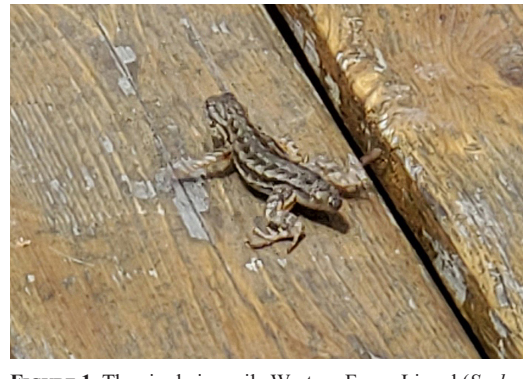

Figure 1. The single juvenile Western Fence Lizard (*Sceloporus occidentalis*) found in the Cloverdale area of Surrey, British Columbia, Canada, 6 June 2020. Total length estimated at 50 mm. Photo: R. Farrell.

of Surrey, British Columbia (Figure 2), but was not captured. The photograph was forwarded to the Royal British Columbia Museum to confirm identification. The dorsal colouration of the lizard was unusual for *S. occidentalis* (A. St. John pers. comm. 9 June 2020), but was similar to that of a specimen photographed at Teddy Bear Cove, Washington (https://inaturalist.ca/observations/47077052). Furthermore, the pale yellow-orange tint to the rear surfaces of fore and hind limbs is diagnostic, distinguishing *S. occidentalis* from Sagebrush Lizard (*Sceloporus graciosus*), which is also found in Washington (Storm *et al*. 1995; St. John 2002; Stebbins and McGinnis 2018). The tail of the lizard was almost entirely missing, but was regenerating. It was a juvenile, with total length estimated at 50 mm based on dimensions of deck boards in the photograph.

Latitude and longitude for the locality were generated from photograph metadata. The location is bordered on the north by 56th Avenue (British Columbia Highway 10) and urban housing and on the south by a semi-rural environment of undeveloped fields and blueberry farms with limited commercial development stretching to the international border. The area between Cloverdale and the border is interrupted by railroad tracks and the Redwood Park housing district; there are no major roads to impede dispersal. Perhaps the only significant barrier to northward dispersal in this region is the Nicomekl River, which is a low-gradient stream south of Cloverdale, ranging

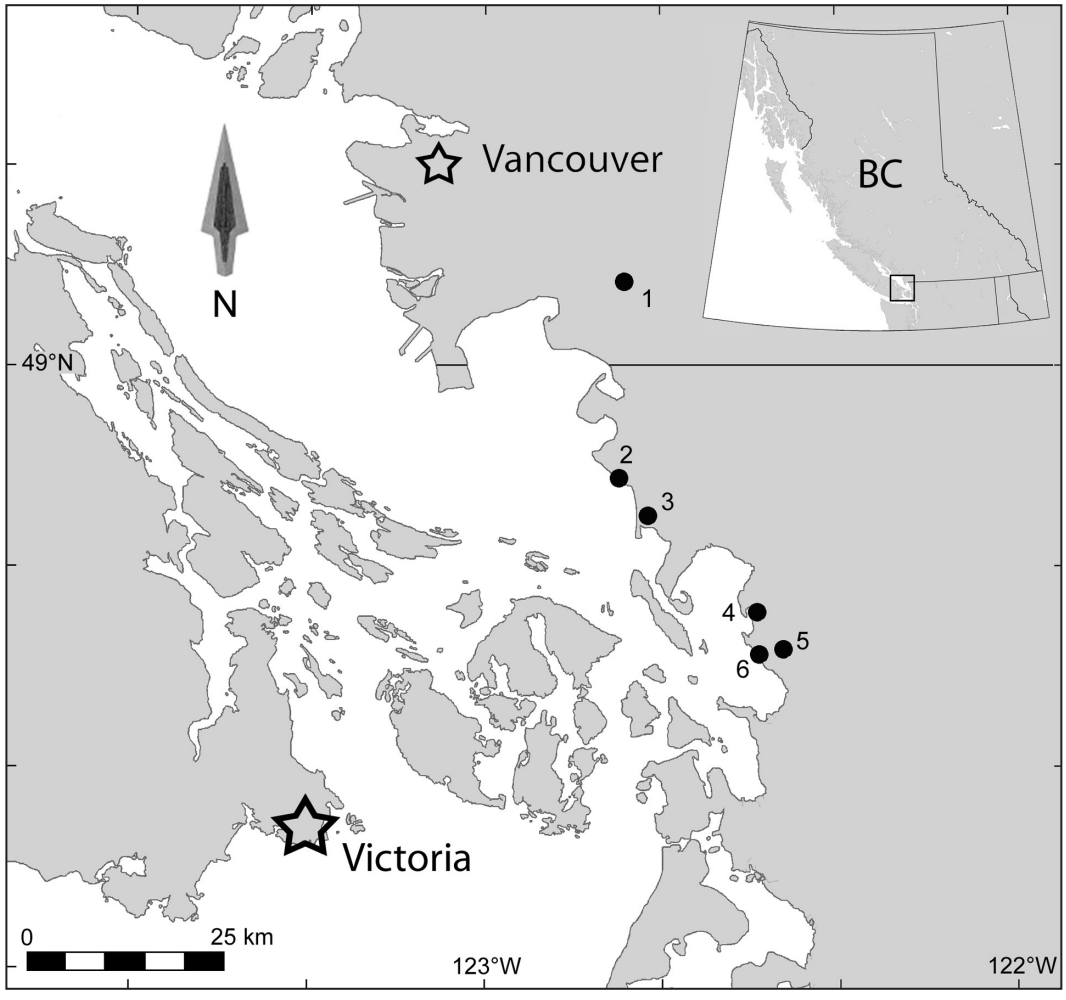

FIGURE 2. Location of the Western Fence Lizard (*Sceloporus occidentalis*) photographed in the Cloverdale area of Surrey, British Columbia (1) and nearest records in Washington: 2. Cherry Point; 3. the Ferndale area, based on Storm *et al*. (1995); 4. Teddy Bear Cove–Chuckanut Mountain (https://inaturalist.ca/observations/47077052); 5. Oyster Creek; 6. Clayton Beach. Populations at 2, 5, and 6 intentionally introduced and studied by Brown (1992).

from 22 m to about 4 m wide. This semi-rural habitat continues south of the border, with scattered woods and farmland south to the Cherry Point area where *S. occidentalis* is known to exist.

In the Puget Sound area of Washington, *S. occidentalis* is known from scattered locations, with the northernmost population introduced at Cherry Point, Washington (Figure 2; Brown 1992; Storm *et al*. 1995). The species also is recorded in iNaturalist from the coast at Teddy Bear Cove–Chuckanut Mountain, south of Fairhaven and Bellingham, and from there south to the Tacoma area. The population at Cherry Point is about 27 km south of where the Cloverdale specimen was photographed. The Cloverdale specimen represents the first verified sighting of a free-ranging *S. occidentalis* in Canada. In addition to this record, *S. occidentalis* was reported on iNaturalist on 29 April 2019, at MacNeill Secondary School, Richmond, British Columbia (https://www.inaturalist.org/observations/23960841), but the report cannot be verified because neither the specimen nor photograph is available. Given other iNaturalist records at that location, the lizard may be in captivity in a classroom. It is possible that the Cloverdale specimen was transported by human activity, as was a single *S. occidentalis* that appeared in cargo at Apra Harbor, Guam, in 1992 (Wiles 2000; Kraus 2009), or it could be an escaped pet.

Author Contributions

Writing – Original Draft: G.H.; Writing – Review & Editing: G.H. and D.V.; Species Identification: R.F., G.H., and D.V.

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