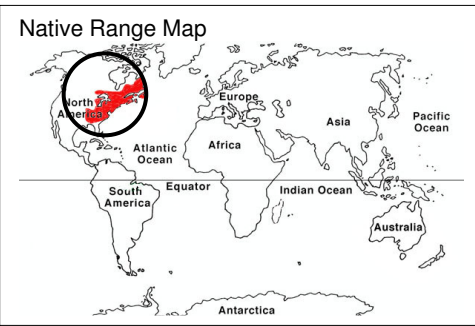


Spotted Salamander



Photo courtesy of Karen Marzynski



Kingdom: Animalia
Phylum: Chordata
Subphylum: Vertebrata
Class: Amphibia
Order: Caudata
Family: Ambystomatidae
Genus: *Ambystoma*
Species: *maculatum*

Habitat

- **In the Wild:** Spotted salamanders can be found from Ontario east to Nova Scotia and south to Georgia and Texas. They inhabit well-drained woodlots rather than low swamp forests, spending most of their time underground.
- **Exhibit Location:** Zoo to You Collection

Characteristics

- Length: 6-9 inches
- The spotted salamander is bluish-black on top and gray on the bottom. It has 2 rows of yellow or orange spots starting at its head and running to the tip of its tail.
- It has a sticky tongue used to catch its prey.
- **Lifespan: In the Wild** 20 years; **In Captivity** 30 years

Behaviors

- The spotted salamander spends most of its time underground, so adults are rarely encountered.
- It lays in the entrance of its burrow with its head visible during the night, but never by day.
- The spotted salamander captures food at the burrow entrance. It does not search actively for food on the surface. Even on rainy nights, it does not leave its burrow.
- It is nocturnal (active at night) and migrates to breeding ponds in late winter and early spring.
- **Enrichments at the Zoo:** rearranging exhibit furniture

Reproduction

- Breeding size is reached at 3-5 years of age. Breeding occurs in March and April in the northern part of its range, January and February in the Great Smokies, and December through February in the South.
- They move to the breeding ponds at night during the first rain after the winter thaw. Males arrive at the breeding ponds first. There is a frenzied (very excited) group courtship.
- Females lay 1 or more compact egg masses (1 mass = 100 eggs) covered with a jelly-like substance that sticks to submerged branches and objects. They often turn green due to beneficial algae in the pond. Larvae hatch in 1-2 months, depending on the water temperature. They become salamanders at 2-4 months.
- There is no parental care of eggs and larvae. Juveniles burrow under debris around the perimeter of the pond and remain there until rainy weather allows more widespread movement.

Diet

- **In the Wild:** adults - worms, insects, underground snails, spiders, slugs
larvae - zooplankton, insect larvae, other spotted salamander larvae
- **At the Zoo:** worms

Conservation Status

- **IUCN status:** not listed; **CITES:** not listed

- Spotted salamanders are becoming rare in some parts of Michigan.
- Acid rains have so polluted the water in some northeastern ponds that eggs cannot develop and populations have died out. Other factors affecting this species are habitat destruction due to logging and land development.
- It seems a real possibility that continued acidification will entirely eliminate the spotted salamander from many of its breeding ponds.
- Clean up efforts are helping. In many places, it is illegal to take wildlife out of the wild without proper authorization. We need to avoid releasing captive reptiles or amphibians into the wild as it disrupts the natural order of the environment.
- Predators include small mammals and snakes; fish eat larvae

Did You Know?/Fun Facts

- The spotted salamander uses its sticky tongue to catch prey.
- They have semi-permeable (absorbs elements from its surroundings) skin and cannot tolerate salts, oils, and the heat of our hands and should therefore be handled as little as possible.
- The word “salamander” is derived from the Greek for “fire lizard.” Old legends claim that the salamander was born from fire. Actually, since they seek out moist, protected areas, they would seek shelter in logs. When the logs were thrown into fire, the salamanders would run out, hence the name.

Sources:

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