

Native Range Map



Barred Tiger Salamander

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



Photo courtesy of Karen Marzynski

Habitat

- **In the Wild:** Barred tiger salamanders live in prairies, forests, forest ponds, and limestone streams from SE Alaska through all of the United States to the edge of the Mexican Plateau.
- **Exhibit Location:** USS Antiquities; Zoo to You Collection

Characteristics

- This is a large, stocky, black salamander with yellow-white blotches or stripes on the sides. The color darkens with age and blends in with ground and leaf litter.
- There are several subspecies of tiger salamander, the largest recorded was 13 inches long. They usually range from 3-6 inches long and weigh only a few ounces.
- Poisonous tail glands produce a toxic milky substance if eaten, but otherwise are not harmful to people.
- **Lifespan: In the Wild** 2-3 years (high mortality rates); **In Captivity** 12-15 years

Behaviors

- Barred tiger salamanders are nocturnal (active at night).
- They spend most of their adult life burrowing in loose substrate or living in burrows of ground squirrels, gophers, or badgers.
- For self-defense, they curl the head and tail up over the back to display the poison glands as a warning.
- **Enrichments at the Zoo:** habitat resembling their natural surroundings

Reproduction

- Sexual maturity may be attained as larvae or after metamorphosis (change) into adulthood.
- Breeding takes place from December–February, after the first spring rain or early spring thaw. They return to natal ponds (ponds where they were born) in large numbers and are very active in courtship, circling each other head to tail and churning the water to foam.
- Females lay 30-50 eggs per egg mass; a large mass or several small groups of eggs stick to water plant stems. Gestation period is 3-4 weeks. The larvae hatch at ½ inch long, with front legs (unlike frogs that have no legs at this stage). They grow to about 4 inches in 3-4 months, and then they change into the adult form.

Diet

- **In the Wild:** any animals small enough to swallow, such as fish, tadpoles, cricket nymphs, grasshoppers, moths, flies, beetles, earthworms; occasionally cannibalistic (eat their own kind)
- **At the Zoo:** crickets, earthworms, pinkie mice

Conservation Status

- The tiger salamander is a “species of special concern” in California and is “endangered” in New York State. They are beneficial to the environment as insect eaters.
- Their numbers are declining due to habitat loss because of agriculture and construction runoff and loss of predator-free ponds and streams. The biggest threat in California is the intentional reintroduction of mosquito fish into California waterways for control of mosquito populations. Road kills also reduce the population.

- Predators: small mammals, snakes; larvae are preyed upon by fish

Did You Know?/Fun Facts

- Its numbers are used to indicate pollution and wetland destruction.
- They have semi-permeable skin (skin absorbs elements from its surroundings) and cannot tolerate salts, oils, and the heat of our hands and should therefore be handled as little as possible.
- Barred tiger salamanders are one of the largest terrestrial (living on land) salamanders in the United States.
- 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:

- San Antonio Zoo, (n.d.). Animals & exhibits: our animals - amphibians - salamanders. Retrieved Sep. 07, 2005, from San Antonio Zoo Web site: <http://www.sazoo-aq.org/animalexhibits/salamanders.html>.
- San Francisco Zoo, (n.d.). Animals: tiger salamander. Retrieved Sep. 07, 2005, from San Francisco Zoo Web site: <http://www.sfzoo.org/cgi-bin/animals.py?ID=6>.
- Sedgwick County Zoo, (n.d.). Barred tiger salamander. Retrieved Sep. 07, 2005, from Sedgwick County Zoo Web site: <http://www.scz.org/animals/btsslmdr.html>.