

Tiger Salamander

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Taxon, Status, and Rank

Species	<i>Ambystoma tigrinum</i> Baird and Girard
Family	Ambystomatidae (Mole Salamanders)
Status	State Monitor
State Rank	S3
Global Rank	G5



General Description

A large, stocky, blotched salamander (to 16.2 cm snout-vent length) with a rounded blunt snout, small protruding eyes, distinct costal grooves and a laterally compressed tail. Ground coloration is dark with olive or yellow blotches over the entire surface of the body. There are paired tubercles on the undersides of the feet. Eggs are small (ovum and gelatinous envelope < 1 cm) and laid singly on plant stalks and twigs. Larvae are pond-type. The gills are large and the filaments are similar in length along the entire stalk. Gilled adults (neotenes) are large (to 17.5 cm snout-vent length) with a wide head, small eyes and wide gill stalks. See [Photos Page](#).

Identification Tips

The Long-toed Salamander commonly occurs with the Tiger Salamander. Eggs and larvae of the two species are similar, however, Tiger Salamander eggs are smaller (ovum and gelatinous envelope < 1 cm) with a light colored ovum and larva, the hatchlings do not have balancers, and larvae have large gills with similarly sized filaments from top to bottom. Metamorphosed Tiger Salamanders have green or yellow blotches over the entire surface of the body, a fourth toe that is not exceptionally long and tubercles on the undersides of the feet. In Klickitat County, the Rough-Skinned Newt also occurs with the Tiger Salamander. Newt eggs are usually hidden within aquatic vegetation. Newt larvae have a small, narrow head with eyes on the lateral edges. There is a dark horizontal stripe through the eye, a line of white dots on the sides, and a pink belly. See [Key Features Page](#).

Phenology

Metamorphosed forms spend most of their lives in the subterranean environment and are rarely seen except for spring migrations to breeding ponds. Surface activity is nocturnal. Breeding takes place in mid-March to early April in the Columbia Basin. Little is known about the timing of metamorphosis in Washington. Larvae are capable of transforming in the fall of their first year

but most apparently do not. Ponds often contain many different size classes of larvae, including huge gilled adults.

Range

Tiger Salamanders live mostly within the Columbia Plateau Ecoregion. Occurrences in the Okanogan and Eastern Cascades Ecoregions are limited to the steppe and ponderosa pine vegetation zones. Larvae of this species, often called "water dogs" are used as fish bait. Escaped and released animals may populate some areas. Tiger Salamanders occur in ponds associated with the Wahluke and Eltopia branches of the Columbia Basin Irrigation Project and may be dispersing to new areas along irrigation canals. An isolated record for Klickitat County is documented through animals collected in the 1930s. See [Distribution Map](#).

For information on the complete range of this species, see [NatureServe Explorer](#).

Habitat and Habits

Occurrence is primarily in arid areas that support shrub-steppe vegetation. In the Colville area, Tiger Salamanders occupy lower elevations in dry habitat types characterized by ponderosa pine/Douglas fir forest. Little is known about terrestrial habitat requirements in Washington. Breeding takes place primarily in perennial ponds, although seasonal water bodies are also used. Gilled adults occur in perennial ponds without fish.

State Status Comments

The status is based on the small number of populations, a range that is restricted to a region heavily altered for agriculture, and a lack of information about this species.

Inventory and Research Needs

Information is needed on the distribution of populations, species life history, population vulnerabilities, and terrestrial habitat requirements.

Threats and Management Concerns

Tiger Salamanders often do not persist in the presence of introduced predatory fish. Larval die-offs have been reported in the western United States, including Lincoln County, Washington. Harvest of the larvae for bait is a potential threat to some populations.

References

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