



Common Mudpuppy (*Necturus maculosus*)

Neck-tur-russ mack-you-low-sus



**Sam Fellows*

Description: 10 to 16 inches. The common mudpuppy is a large, aquatic salamander with smooth skin, and a distinctively finned tail, and feather-like bushy reddish colored gills as well as four toes on each foot. Ground color can range from brown, gray, to grayish brown with numerous dark spots and mottling. Juvenile common mudpuppies may be black, dark brown, to dark grayish brown with two wide longitudinal stripes ranging from light brown, yellow, to yellowish brown in color and forming a “V” shape at the snout. A faint, dark ocular stripe may also be seen on adults as well.

Taxonomy and Classification:

<http://www.madisonherps.org>

Life: All living, physical, and animate entities

Domain: Eukaryota

Kingdom: Animalia

Phylum: Chordata/Vertebrata

Class: Amphibia

Order: Caudata/Urodela

Suborder: Salamandroidea

Family: Proteidae

Genus: Necturus

Species: *Necturus maculosus**

*Taxonomy subject to change and revision.

Similar/Confusing Species: Larval or some populations of adult paedomorphic ambystomid salamanders (*Ambystoma sp.*) tend to be smaller than mudpuppies, have less bushy and/or lack reddish colored gills, occupy more temporary/ephemeral wetlands or bodies of water than do mudpuppies, and are different colors than mudpuppies (described above). For tadpole/larvae identification, see the following link below:

<http://watermonitoring.uwex.edu/pdf/level1/wepp/TadpoleLarvalSalamanderKeys.pdf>

Etymology: Necturus-Nektos (swimming) oura (tail). maculosus-dappled or spotted.

Subspecies: Common Mudpuppy (*Necturus maculosus maculosus*).

Range & Habitat: The common mudpuppy ranges statewide in permanent bodies of water including lakes, large ponds, rivers, streams, and impoundments.

Habits & Natural History: Strictly an aquatic species, the common mudpuppy is the largest species of salamander in Wisconsin. Mudpuppies undergo a phenomenon known as paedomorphism, where adult life stages retain larval or juvenile features for an aquatic lifestyle including retaining the presence of tail fins, and possessing the characteristic bushy red gills for oxygen and nutrient cycling, much in the same manner as fish. Common mudpuppies are active throughout the year, where they are occasionally captured by ice fisherman who erroneously believe these harmless salamanders to be venomous, poisonous, or otherwise dangerous. Mudpuppies feed on small fish, aquatic insects, arthropods, and other crustaceans.

Phenology: Common mudpuppies may be active throughout the year.

Conservation Status: WI Special Concern, regulated by the WI DNR. IUCN Red List Least Concern (LC).

Contact

Authored by Eric Roscoe. For any additional questions, comments, and/or concerns regarding this species, group of species, or this informational sheet, please email and contact the Madison Area

<http://www.madisonherps.org>

Herpetological Society at info@madisonherps.org

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