



Eastern Newt (*Notophthalmus viridescens ssp.*)

No-top-thal-mus vi-ri-disens loo-e-zee-ann-en-sis



**Sam Fellows*

Description: The central newt is a fairly small caudate ranging from 1 ½ to 4 inches in length. Ground color of adults can range from dark green, olive, olive brown, brown, to orangish-brown, with tiny red, orange, and black spots and flecking along the dorsolateral sides. The skin may be smooth in aquatic adults, or dry and rough in the terrestrial adult and eft phases. The ventral, or belly tends to be yellow to orange-yellow with numerous dark flecks. The tail is finned, and much less pronounced on terrestrial phases than aquatic phases, and there is often a dark ocular stripe present as well. The eft tends to be a reddish-orange to brownish orange in color with similar spots and flecking.

Taxonomy and Classification:

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Life: All living, physical, and animate entities

Domain: Eukaryota

Kingdom: Animalia

Phylum: Chordata/Vertebrata

Class: Amphibia

Order: Caudata/Urodela

Suborder: Salamandroidea

Family: Salamandridae

Genus: *Notophthalmus*

Species: *Notophthalmus viridescens**

*Taxonomy subject to change and revision.

Similar/Confusing Species: Eastern newts and their efts can be distinguished from other Wisconsin salamanders/caudates by their smaller, dark brownish to olive-brown mottled larvae, lack of paedomorphic features (bushy gills) as aquatic adults, mottled yellowish to yellowish-orange ventral surfaces, and dry, rough granular skin as terrestrial efts. For tadpole/larvae identification, see the following link below:

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

Etymology: Notophthalmus- Nota (mark) ophthalmos (eye). viridescens-viridis (green). Louisianensis (Louisiana).

Subspecies: Central Newt (*Notophthalmus viridescens louisianensis*). Early literature also lists the Eastern Newt (*Notophthalmus v. viridescens*) as occurring in Wisconsin, but no documentation currently supports this.

Range & Habitat: Central newts probably range statewide in Wisconsin, but tend to be uncommon with localized, scattered occurrences. Aquatic adults favor shallow, weedy temporary to semi-permanent ephemeral ponds, ditches, and wetlands. Efts and terrestrial adults may be found in surrounding lowland and river bottom, to upland mixed forests under logs, leaf litter, and other forest floor debris.

Habits & Natural History: Central newts are a subspecies of eastern newt that may undergo several different life stages following the larval stage depending on seasonality, temperature, and weather patterns. Terrestrial juvenile newts are known as “efts”, and tend to be the least common stage in Wisconsin. Adult newts may undergo transformation to and/or from the adult aquatic stage or adult terrestrial phase depending on the above factors. Eastern newts may secrete a distasteful substance to avoid predation, and may undergo a defensive mechanism known as the unken reflex, where the brightly colored underside is displayed as a warning to predators.

Phenology: Eastern or central newts begin emerging from overwintering during the first warm rains of late March, April, or early May and remain active throughout the year through September or October (or even later if warmer temperatures persist or otherwise permit) although they are very fossorial

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during non-migratory periods.

Conservation Status: WI “Common” with no special protections, but 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 Herpetological Society at info@madisonherps.org

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