



## **Four toed Salamander (*Hemidactylum scutatum*)**

*Hemi-dact-ee-lee-um scoot-tot-um*



**Description:** Four toed salamanders are a small, slender bodied salamander reaching 2 ½ to 4 inches in length. Dorsal background color can range from greenish brown to reddish brown with paler sides, and a white to cream colored belly with dark, scattered spots and flecks. Four toes are present on the hind feet, and the base of the brighter orangish, yellowish, to reddish brown tail is noticeably constricted. Costal grooves are also present in this species.

### **Taxonomy and Classification:**

**Life:** All living, physical, and animate entities

**Domain:** Eukaryota

**Kingdom:** Animalia

**Phylum:** Chordata/Vertebrata

**Class:** Amphibia

**Order:** Caudata/Urodela

**Suborder:** Salamandroidea

**Family:** Plethodontidae

**Genus:** Hemidactylum

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**Species:** *Hemidactylium scutatum*\*

*\*Taxonomy subject to change and revision.*

**Confusing/Similar Species:** Eastern red backed salamanders (*Plethodon cinereus*) lack a constricted tail base, and have five toes on the hind feet rather than four.

**Etymology:** Hemidactylium- Hemi (half) daktylos (finger or daktylikos, of the finger). scutatum-scutatus (shield shaped, or armed with a shield).

**Subspecies:** None.

**Range & Habitat:** Four toed salamanders probably range throughout the state in suitable habitat, but most populations seem to be small. These salamanders are fairly specific in breeding habitat requirements, preferring edges of sphagnum bogs, roadside ditches, and deciduous to mixed forest wetlands with overhanging moss. They also turn up in nearby habitats, such as mixed deciduous-coniferous forests and old pine plantations, as well.

**Habits & Natural History:** The four toed salamander is a fairly small, slender bodied plethontid salamander, and the only member belonging to its genus. Four toed salamanders begin yearly activity in March or April, and have fairly specific breeding habitat requirements, being that of moss overhanging shallow, temporary pools or flooded wetlands. Four toed salamanders are known to brood eggs individually or communally before dispersing into drier surrounding forests during the summer. These salamanders can also practice caudal autotomy, or dropping of their tails, to escape predation.

**Phenology:** Four toed salamanders 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).

**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 Herpetological Society at [info@madisonherps.org](mailto:info@madisonherps.org)

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