



## Aquatic Caecilians *(Typhlonectes spp.)*

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### **Real Life Rubber “Eels”!**

Caecilians are a lesser known group of elongated, limbless, wormlike or snakelike amphibians found primarily in tropical to sub-tropical regions worldwide except Antarctica. Most caecilian species have only vestigial eyes designed to detect changes in photo sensory methods (changes between light and dark) and ringed annuli along their bodies to also acting as a lateral sensory system. Most of the aquatic species of caecilians are elongated and limbless with vestigial eyes, and range in color from dark grayish, olive gray, to blackish. They are also often referred to as “rubber eels”, although they are not truly eels or fish. This aquatic genus consists of two species, *T. natans* and *T. compressicauda*.

### **Taxonomy**

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

**Domain:** Eukaryota

**Kingdom:** Animalia

**Phylum/Sub Phylum:** Chordata/Vertebrata

**Class:** Amphibia

**Order:** Gymnophiona/Apoda

**Family:** Typhlonectidae

**Genus:** Typhlonectes

**Species:** *Typhlonectes spp.\**

*\*Taxonomy subject to change and revision.*

### **Lifespan and Longevity**

If provided the proper care, aquatic caecilians have the potential of reaching 4 to 5 years or more in captivity.

### **Distribution and Habitat**

The aquatic genus, *Typhlonectes spp.*, are found in permanent to seasonally flooded ponds, lakes, rivers, and wetlands of South America (Colombia Venezuela, and surrounding regions).

### **Conservation Status**

Conservation status is dependent upon the species. Some are IUCN Red List Least Concern (LC). Others are Not Evaluated for the IUCN Red List (NE) or otherwise Data Deficient (DD).

### **Legal and Regulatory Status (\*Subject to Change)**

Consult with your local, municipal, and state ordinances and regulations for any ownership

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restrictions.

### **Experience Level Required**

Intermediate/Moderate.

### **Size**

Most aquatic caecilians reach 20 to 24 inches in length, although they have the potential to reach slightly larger sizes.

### **Housing and Enclosure**

Aquatic caecilians should be provided a secure, escape proof aquarium or terrarium designed to hold water. A 10 to 20 gallon long aquarium is of sufficient size depending on the number of animals being housed. They can be housed in pairs or multiples provided adequate food and hiding opportunities are provided, and they are monitored. In general, it is also preferable that aquatic caecilians not be housed with fish, since they may compete for food and resources as well as possibly predate upon one another depending on their sizes and circumstances. Provide an appropriate filtration system as well as water heating, which will assist in maintaining water clarity and quality as well as sufficient water temperatures for these caecilians. Although these caecilians respire, or breathe primarily through their skin, they will also breathe air and should be provided with several inches of air space in the enclosure. Other furnishings to increase safety and security in the enclosure can also be provided, including live plants, rocks, slabs, logs, and other suitable hides. Substrates that allow for burrowing should also be included, and can include fine aquarium sand or gravel. Any live plants in the enclosure should be firmly and securely planted to prevent uprooting.

### **Temperature, Lighting, and Humidity**

Aquatic caecilians have simple and undemanding heating and lighting requirements in captivity, and do not require additional UVA/UVB lighting, although providing it in moderated amounts can be greatly beneficial for their health, immune system, and overall wellness. Aquatic caecilians otherwise do not require any other special lighting or heating unless live plants are also maintained, although water temperatures should be maintained at around 77 to 80 degrees F. For any supplemental heating that may be needed, use a low wattage incandescent or UVA/UVB bulb, radiant or ceramic heat emitter, submersible water heater, or UTH (under tank heating element). They are susceptible to health and husbandry related issues if water temperatures are too cold or too warm for these unusual amphibians. More specific lighting, heating, and humidity product suggestions and recommendations that can best suit one's needs, as well as those of one's animals can be given as well.

### **Feeding, Diet, and Nutrition**

***Primarily Carnivorous***; Depending on the species, caecilians in the wild are primarily carnivorous to scavengers, feeding on insects, earthworms, other invertebrates, small fish, other small amphibians, and carrion, or dead and decaying animal matter. In captivity, aquatic caecilians can be fed daily to every other day, and will consume appropriately sized feeder fish, redworms, bloodworms, earthworms, crickets, mealworms, and other feeder insects and larvae, as well as some commercially available pelleted fish foods of appropriate nutritional value. Any uneaten foods should be cleaned or removed regularly to maintain water clarity and quality. Ensure that any live foods given are also supplemented with calcium and vitamin D3 for the caecilian's optimal health and well-being. More specific dietary and supplementary product suggestions and recommendations that can best suit one's needs, as well as those of one's animals can be given as well.

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## **Handling**

Aquatic caecilians are delicate and sensitive skinned amphibians that should not really be handled, and are more suitable for viewing. Use a suitable sized aquarium net to move aquatic caecilians when cleaning the enclosure or whenever necessary.

**\*\*Also be sure to practice basic cleanliness and hygiene associated with proper husbandry after touching or handling any animals or animal enclosures to prevent the possibility of contracting salmonellosis or any other zoonotic pathogens\*\***

## **Contact**

Authored by Eric Roscoe. For any additional questions, comments, and/or concerns regarding this animal, group of animals, or this care sheet, please email and contact the Madison Area Herpetological Society at [info@madisonherps.org](mailto:info@madisonherps.org)

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