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Ensatina Salamanders (*Ensatina eschscholtzii* ssp.)

Jewels of the Pacific Northwest!

Ensatinas are a complex of plethodontid, or lungless salamanders consisting of several races and subspecies occurring in the cool, moist, and humid coniferous to deciduous forests and woodlands, chaparral, and other damp, coastal microenvironments along the Pacific coast of the United States and western Canada. Extremely shy and secretive, these unique salamanders possess and employ several defensive strategies when disturbed, including wriggling and sometimes dropping their fragile, delicate tails to distract predators long enough for the salamander to escape and/or secreting a distasteful, potentially toxic alkaline substance from glands near their tails when threatened. Approximately seven to eight subspecies and races of ensatinas are recognized, and they may vary considerably in their color and patterns. Ensatinas are generally slender bodied salamanders with prominent costal grooves, and a ground color ranging from brick reddish, light brown, or reddish-brown with sometimes lighter yellowish to orangish limbs and undersides, to black or dark brown with small to large, irregular pale yellowish, whitish, orangish, reddish, to greenish-yellow blotches. Subspecies include the Monterey Ensatina - (*E.e.eschscholtzii*), Small or Yellow-blotched Ensatina - (*E.e.croceator*), Large-blotched Ensatina - (*E.e.klauberi*), Oregon Ensatina - (*E.e.oregonensis*), Painted Ensatina - (*E.e.picta*), Sierra Nevada Ensatina - (*E.e.platensis*), and the Yellow-eyed Ensatina (*E.e.xanthoptica*).

Taxonomy

Life: All living, physical, and animate entities

Domain: Eukaryota

Kingdom: Animalia

Phylum/Sub Phylum: Chordata/Vertebrata

Class: Amphibia

Order: Caudata/Urodela

Suborder: Salamandroidea

Family: Plethodontidae

Genus: *Ensatina*

Species: *Ensatina eschscholtzii* ssp.*

*Taxonomy subject to change and revision.

Lifespan and Longevity

If provided the proper care, ensatina salamanders can attain longevity of at least 5 years or potentially more, although their captive longevity is uncertain.

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Distribution and Habitat

Ensatinas are indigenous to the Pacific west coast of the United States and western Canada, where they occur in humid, moist, and very seclusive deciduous to coniferous forests and woodlands, chaparrals, stream and river margins, and other permanent to semi-permanent wetlands and bodies of water. Depending on the race and subspecies, these species may range from central California, through Oregon and Washington state, to southern British Columbia.

Conservation Status

Conservation status dependent upon the species. Some Not Evaluated for the IUCN Red List (NE) or otherwise Data Deficient (DD).

Experience Level Required

Moderate/Intermediate to Advanced.

Size

Ensatina salamanders typically range from 4 to 7 inches as adults.

Housing and Enclosure

Housing must be sealed and escape proof with a secured lid or aquarium hood. Up to 6 adult ensatina salamanders can be housed in a secure, well ventilated cool, damp 10 to 15 gallon aquarium or other enclosure with coconut husk and/or deciduous leaf litter mixture, chemical free potting soil, sphagnum moss, or cypress mulch substrate. Substrate should be maintained at slightly moist levels, but should not be allowed to become too moist or dry. Any substrates used should also be maintained at as neutral of a PH as possible, and should be monitored using a PH meter. Artificial plants, cork bark hides, and driftwood can also be included as cage furnishings and additional hiding places. A small, shallow water dish or pan should also be provided and be maintained. These salamanders can be housed together in appropriately larger enclosures depending on the age, size, and sex of the animals. Floor space is more important than height for these salamanders.

Temperature, Lighting, and Humidity

Ensatina salamanders 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. For any supplemental heating that may be needed, use a low wattage incandescent or UVA/UVB bulb, radiant or ceramic heat emitter, or UTH (under tank heating element). Maintain these salamanders within a temperature range of 48 to 64 degrees F. Do not exceed 70 degrees F for prolonged periods of time. Ensatinas must be maintained at these cooler temperatures, or they will become very easily heat stressed. Also mist the enclosure at least 3 to 4 times daily to maintain moisture and humidity as well. 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

Insectivorous to Carnivorous; Ensatina salamanders are insectivorous, and in the wild they will feed on a variety of insects, worms, and other invertebrates. They will also occasionally consume smaller vertebrates as well, and can also be cannibalistic under certain circumstances.

In captivity, these salamanders will hunt and feed primarily at night, but should not be overfed in order to prevent obesity and other health related concerns. Providing variety is important, and

these salamanders can be fed chemical and pesticide free earthworms, mealworms, white worms, waxworms, silkworms, crickets, small spiders, or roaches. No additional vitamin, mineral, or nutrient supplements are required to maintain these salamanders if the above varied diet is followed, although gutloading or supplementing with calcium and vitamin D3 can still be beneficial for their 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.

Handling

Ensatina salamanders are very delicate, soft bodied amphibians with sensitive, permeable skin as with most amphibians. Wash hands thoroughly before and after handling them, and avoid wearing any lotions, creams, or oils before handling any amphibian. Handling these salamanders should be minimized, or preferably avoided whenever possible and only when absolutely 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

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