



*Eric Roscoe

Spotted Salamander (*Ambystoma maculatum*)

Spotted Gems of Northern Forests

Also known as yellow spotted salamanders, spotted are large, stocky terrestrial salamanders which belong to the larger family of Ambystomatidae, or the mole Salamander family, and tend to be secretive and fossorial as adults. They are large, stocky salamanders with broad, rounded heads and bodies. Ground color can be blackish, brown, or grayish with two linear rows of yellowish rounded dorsal spots or blotches along the back of the head and neck, body, and tail. The pair of spots behind the head and neck may also be orangish as well. Due to their heavily burrowing, fossorial nature for much of the year, spotted salamanders are secretive salamanders that may only be seen above ground during or around spring or fall rainy weather. During the rainy, wet weather in spring and fall, many of these salamanders will emerge from or return to their temporary ponds and wetlands to breed or overwinter, and are often found crossing roads and other open areas. Some populations of spotted salamanders can also be paedomorphic, meaning they retain their aquatic, juvenile larval features as adults depending on their local environmental conditions.

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: Ambystomatidae

Genus: *Ambystoma*

Species: *Ambystoma maculatum**

*Taxonomy subject to change and revision.

Lifespan and Longevity

If provided the proper care, spotted salamanders can attain longevity of 10 to 15 years or more.

Distribution and Habitat

Spotted salamanders are a widely ranging species of salamander found in the Midwestern to Eastern United States and into Southeastern Canada, where they are typically found in older, mature mixed or deciduous northern forests, woodlands, and woodlots with nearby temporary ephemeral ponds and wetlands for breeding and reproduction.

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Conservation Status

IUCN Red List Least Concern (LC).

Experience Level Required

Novice/Beginner to Moderate/Intermediate.

Size

Spotted 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. A single adult spotted salamander can be housed in a 10 to 15 gallon aquarium or other enclosure with coconut husk, chemical free potting soil, or cypress mulch substrate. Provide a large, shallow water dish and change frequently or when dirtied. Due to their sensitive skin, water with heavy metals, chlorines, or contaminants should *not* be used. Artificial plants, cork bark hides, and driftwood can also be included as cage furnishings and additional hiding places. Floor space is more important than height for these salamanders.

Temperature, Lighting, and Humidity

Spotted 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 low 60's to mid-70 degrees F. Do not exceed 80 degrees F. 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; Spotted 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, spotted salamanders have voracious appetites, but should not be overfed in order to prevent obesity and other health related concerns. Providing variety is important, and spotted salamanders can be fed chemical and pesticide free earthworms, waxworms, silkworms, crickets, or roaches. Small, pre-killed rodents can also be given on occasion, but give these sparingly, if at all. No additional vitamin, mineral, or nutrient supplements are required to maintain spotted 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

Spotted salamanders are 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 spotted salamanders should be minimized whenever possible and only when absolutely necessary.

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****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

Disclaimer: Note that the information provided in these, or any care sheets, are not intended to be all-exhaustive, and further research and care should always be sought and provided when it comes to any species one may prospectively be interested in. These care sheets are also not intended to serve as substitutes for professional veterinary medical care and husbandry should any animal require it. Always seek proper and professional veterinary care for any animal should the need arise, and be prepared ahead of time for any and all husbandry costs and expenses that may occur with any animal beyond the initial purchase. Any animal owned is ultimately a matter of personal/individual care and responsibility.

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