

## EASTERN TIGER SALAMANDER

*Ambystoma tigrinum*

**Order:** Caudata  
**Family:** Ambystomatidae  
**FNAI Ranks:** G5/S3  
**U.S. Status:** none  
**FL Status:** none



**Description:** A relatively large (to 8.25 in. = 210 mm), heavy-bodied salamander with irregularly shaped cream, yellow, or greenish blotches on the otherwise dark back, tail, and sides. Belly olive-yellow with marbled dark markings. Head large with protruding eyes; snout rounded; legs stout. Aquatic larva has large bushy gills, a high tail fin, and is plain gray to brown, though sometimes with vague stripes.

**Similar Species:** Even young tiger salamanders are larger and more robust than other Florida terrestrial salamanders. The smaller *Ambystoma* rarely exceed 5 in. (127 mm) and can be distinguished by color: marbled salamander (*A. opacum*) has white or silver crossbars on back and tail; mole salamander (*A. talpoideum*) is plain brown to black with occasional light flecking; flatwoods salamander (*A. cingulatum*; see species account) is black with delicate white to gray markings that may form narrow lines or a net-like pattern. Larvae of all three have spots or lines. Slimy salamander (*Plethodon grobmani*) is black with many small white spots, has a larger head with a faint groove running from each nostril to upper lip, and leaves a sticky residue when touched.

**Habitat:** Pine, hardwood, mixed forests, and ruderal areas, typically with clay soils; possibly tolerant of some disturbance. Usually breeds in ponds that lack predatory fish; isolated wetlands with emergent herbaceous vegetation are preferred.

**Seasonal Occurrence:** Breeds late November - January, with adults moving overland to and from ponds at that time. At other times, adults and juveniles remain underground. Aquatic larvae remain in ponds for 2 - 4 months, usually January - April.

**Florida Distribution:** Northern and north-central Florida, potentially including the entire Panhandle and extending southward as far as Hernando County. Peninsular distribution appears to coincide grossly with that of the Brooksville Ridge. See maps in Moler (1992:72) and Krysko et al. (2011).

**Range-wide Distribution:** Various subspecies occupy much of U.S. and extend into Canada and Mexico. Eastern subspecies (*A. t. tigrinum*) occurs from Minnesota to eastern Texas and eastward to Atlantic, though absent from much of Appalachians, Mississippi delta, and New England.

**Conservation Status:** Though declining from habitat loss, populations exist on at least one state forest (Blackwater River). In developed areas, deaths of migrating adults and juveniles crossing roads can be so high as to extirpate local populations.

**Protection and Management:** Prevent drainage or filling of isolated wetlands, as well as the introduction of predatory fishes. Maintain upland buffers of habitat around breeding ponds. Because of the risk of spreading diseases that affect amphibians, researchers should take care to avoid cross-pond contamination when sampling multiple sites.

**References:** Ashton and Ashton 1988a, Bartlett and Bartlett 1999, Conant and Collins 1991, Moler (ed.) 1992, Mount 1975, Petranka 1998, Semlitsch 1983.



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early larva © Barry Mansell