APALACHICOLA DUSKY SALAMANDER
Desmognathus apalachicolae

Order: Caudata
Family: Plethodontidae
FNAI Ranks: G4/S2S3
U.S. Status: none
FL Status: none

Description: A small (to 4 in. = 10 cm), stocky, generally brownish to gray, semi-aquatic salamander with highly variable pattern. Usually 5 - 7 pairs of light, rounded, dark-edged and often coalescing blotches on the back, although old males are uniformly brown; belly light but with traces of dark pigment. Hind legs larger than front; light diagonal line below each eye. Tail comprising more than half of total length and round in cross-section, though flattens from side to side posteriorly to a filament-like tip. Larvae with tiny silvery gills and bright dorsal blotches.

Similar Species: All dusky salamanders (*Desmognathus*) share the large hind legs and diagonal line beneath eye. Distinguishing from very similar but common dusky (*D.* cf. *D. fuscus*), as well as from seal salamander (*D. monticola*; see species account), is best based on locality, as ranges do not overlap that of *D. apalachicolae*. Southern dusky (*D. auriculatus*; see species account) is larger and darker, including belly. Tails of both monticola and auriculatus tend to be flattened from side to side.

Habitat: Edges of small seepage streams at bottoms of deep, moist, wooded ravines that support mixed-hardwood forest on slopes. Usually hides beneath rocks, logs, or leaf litter during day. Larvae aquatic; prefer extremely shallow water trickling over sandy or organic substrate.

Seasonal Occurrence: Present year-round. Larvae present mid-summer to March.

Florida Distribution: Restricted to a few river drainages of the Apalachicolan region, specifically streams that are tributaries of the Apalachicola/Chipola and Ochlockonee rivers (five contiguous counties).

Range-wide Distribution: Lower Chattahoochee River, Georgia-Alabama border; upper Choctawhatchee River, southern Alabama; lower Flint River, Georgia; northern Florida as above.

Conservation Status: Locally abundant within restricted range. Many Florida populations occur on state lands and a Nature Conservancy preserve.

Protection and Management: Maintain ecological integrity of stream habitats. Because of potential siltation (if disturbed) as well as their importance to water recharge, it is imperative that adjacent uplands be managed ecologically (e.g., protect groundcover, avoid clear-cutting and use of herbicides). No portion of any stream supporting a population should be impounded; existing impoundments should be removed, and streamside forests restored.

References: Bartlett and Bartlett 1999, Conant and Collins 1991, Means and Karlan 1989, Petranka 1998.

male (above) and female © D. Bruce Means