

## FOUR-TOED SALAMANDER

*Hemidactylium scutatum*



**Order:** Caudata  
**Family:** Plethodontidae  
**FNAI Ranks:** G5/S2  
**U.S. Status:** none  
**FL Status:** none

**Description:** A small (to 3.5 in. = 89 mm) terrestrial salamander characterized by rusty brown back with black dots, grayish sides, and bright white belly with bold black spots. Four toes on each hind foot; marked constriction at base of tail (which detaches easily) just behind rear legs; short, rounded snout. Aquatic larva brownish with small, bushy gills, short tail with dorsal fin extending onto back, and four toes on hind feet.

**Similar Species:** No others with similar belly coloration or tail constriction. Most salamanders, including larvae, have five toes on each hind foot, although these can be hard to count. Dwarf salamanders (*Eurycea quadridigitata* complex) have only four toes on hind feet but usually have yellowish belly and dark stripe on each side.

**Habitat:** Usually areas with sphagnum moss in forested wet areas, especially stream floodplains, but potentially spring seepages and edges of streams and ponds. Adults often hide beneath logs and sphagnum mats; larvae aquatic.

**Seasonal Occurrence:** Present but difficult to observe year-round. May breed in late winter - early spring, when adults may be more active on surface.

**Florida Distribution:** This widespread species reaches the southern edge of its range in Florida, where it is relatively uncommon. It is known principally from two disjunct areas of the panhandle: the upper Ochlockonee River basin (Gadsden and Leon counties) and Alaquia and Basin creek drainages in Walton County. Also recorded from the Apalachicola River basin in the vicinity of Lake Seminole (Florida [Liberty County] and Georgia).

**Range-wide Distribution:** Eastern U.S., including Appalachian Mountains and Plateau, Piedmont, and Great Lakes region. Florida populations may be disjunct.

**Conservation Status:** Rare but may occur on at least one federal (Eglin Air Force

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Base) and one state (Lake Talquin State Forest) tract.

**Protection and Management:** Maintain ecological integrity of streams and upland buffers around all occupied sites. Avoid impoundment, channelization, and activities that might lead to sedimentation. Maintain hardwood canopy in floodplains. Eliminate or control feral hogs, which disrupt habitat and may even eat salamanders.

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



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