



Tiger salamander

Ambystoma tigrinum

Order	Caudata
Family	Ambystomatidae
Genus	<i>Ambystoma</i>
Species	<i>tigrinum</i>

Geographic Range: Worldwide they are limited to North America, in California they live in the Central Valley and lower elevations along the coast



Habitat: Wetlands and grasslands with long-lasting vernal pools which are free from predatory fish

Niche: Aquatic as larvae, terrestrial as adults, nocturnal, carnivorous

Wild Diet: Earthworms and other invertebrates

Life Span: 5 – 6 years in the wild, 12 – 15 in captivity

Appearance: Black with yellowish blotches or stripes which are unique for each individual, body length is between 3 – 8 inches, weight is between 60 – 100 grams

Adaptations: Adults live almost exclusively on land, entering the water only to breed. Typically returning to its birthplace, its eggs are laid in clusters and attached to underwater vegetation. The larvae of the tiger salamander live in the water, developing limbs shortly after hatching. Dense populations of larvae can trigger cannibalism. The rate at which larvae metamorphose into adults is dependant on temperature, food level and numbers of other salamanders or competitors.

Fun Facts: Tiger salamanders have a tail gland which produces a toxic milky secretion for self-defense. They will curl up head and tail to display this gland as a warning. They also have specialized foot pads for burrowing.

At the Zoo: Our tiger salamanders live in the Koret Animal Resource Center.

Comparison: Metamorphosis is the process in which an amphibian transforms from its larval or tadpole stage to an adult. The process differs slightly between frogs and salamanders, adult salamanders can retain gills into sexual maturity. Both frogs and salamanders begin with gills,

tails and a mouth. They then develop hind legs and later front legs. Lungs develop and eyes move into their position on the head. In frogs, the tail is then absorbed back into the body.

Status and Conservation: Least concern – subspecies California tiger salamander is Vulnerable and only found in California

Threats: Competition from introduced species, road mortality, loss of vernal pools as well as habitat and accumulation of acid in breeding grounds

Bibliography: Nature Trail Handbook, Animal Diversity Web, IUCN Red List



Photo by Lori Quinn

