



Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries Natural Heritage Program

Hemidactylium scutatum Four-Toed Salamander



Identification: They are reddish brown or brown above with silver flecking on the sides. The belly is milk white with small black spots. As its name implies, the Four-toed salamander can be readily identified from the presence of only four toes on each hind foot. Most other salamander species have five hind toes. There is an obvious constriction at the base of the tail.

Measurements: Typically 2-3.5 inches, occasionally 4 inches.

Taxonomic comments: No proposed subspecies.

Status: Global rank is **G5** and state rank is **S1**.

Habitat: Adults: Under logs, moss, and rocks in mature hardwood and pine forests. Larvae: In slowly flowing water or temporary pools with moss or sedges and without fish.

Range: Very patchy distribution throughout Midwest and east coast. Many states have isolated populations.

Food habits: Adults: terrestrial invertebrates. Larvae: Aquatic Invertebrates. Nesting females do not eat.

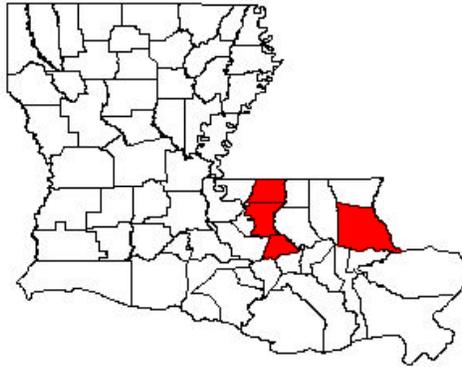
Life expectancy: The four-toed salamander has lived 9 years in captivity; there are no records from the wild.

Reproduction: Sexually maturity is reached 18 months after hatching. Breeding begins in early winter, December and January, and females lay eggs in sphagnum moss or on logs above the water. Nests typically have 30 eggs but can range in size from 12-80 eggs. Females tend to the eggs for two months. Upon hatching larvae drop into water. After 6 weeks larvae transform into adults.

Reason for decline: Habitat destruction including deforestation, drainage of boggy wetlands (preferred habitat), development, and agriculture runoff (pesticide and fertilizer use).

Interesting facts: 1) As a defense technique, many salamanders and lizards can lose their tail when it is grasped. However, unlike most salamanders, the tail of the four-toed salamander does not need to be grasped for the salamander to detach it. This species will voluntarily release its tail prior to the predator making contact with the salamander. The tail continues to wiggle, further distracting predators. 2) When a female is ready to lay her eggs she normally turns upside down and lays her eggs in such a way that they attach to moss strands or other structures that may be hanging down.

Known distribution in Louisiana:



Dates of documented observations are: 1964, 1976, 1998, 1999, and 2001

References

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