

Lake Ridge Outdoors

All salamanders are newts, but not all newts are salamanders. This is an eft (immature) Red Spotted Newt. Virginia is home to 50 salamander species, the majority of which are nocturnal and carnivorous, preying on insects, frogs, fish, and even other salamanders. Some of the species are fully aquatic, while others are semi-aquatic or fully terrestrial. The ones we see migrating in spring are semi-aquatic. Throughout most of the year, semi-aquatic species like spotted salamanders and eastern tiger salamanders live on land beneath rocks and logs, or in the cool, moist leaf litter of deciduous or mixed forests. Over the winter they hibernate underground, and then from late winter through early spring—peaking in March and April—hundreds of them emerge to find water, seek a mate and breed, en masse.



Photo by Richard Poorman

In the spring, when the first rains have arrived some salamander species will be looking for **vernal pools**. A vernal pool is a seasonal, “ephemeral” or temporary type of wetland habitat that’s formed by the accumulation of winter rains and snowfall, typically in shallow depressions in woodlands.

Salamanders have lizard-like bodies but lack scales, external ear openings, and claws on their toes. About 502 species occur world-wide, almost always in moist environments. During dry periods, terrestrial forms go deep underground and may aestivate.

They usually have 4 similar sized legs and wet, glandular skin. Most are silent and their larval stages often have visible, feathery gills behind their heads, but otherwise look like less colorful adults. Unique amongst almost all other vertebrates, many salamanders can regenerate lost limbs. Some are capable of ‘breathing’ through their skin in a process called cutaneous respiration. They are all predatory and rarely climb.

A group of salamanders is called a congress. The Americas are quite rich in salamanders, having more than all the rest of the world combined. Virginia has approximately 10% (55) of the world’s species with 11 being potentially found locally.