

Massachusetts Animals - Spotted Salamander

Facts at a Glance

TYPE OF ANIMAL

Amphibian

SCIENTIFIC NAME

Ambystoma maculatum

FOUND WHERE

Eastern United States from
Maine to South Carolina

HEIGHT/LENGTH

6 – 10 in. long (15 – 25 cm)

WEIGHT

Average about 120 – 200 g,
Females often bigger than males

CONSERVATION STATUS

Least Concern



Easily characterized by their deep brown or black skin dotted with trademark yellow and orange toned spots along the back and sides. As amphibians, they have smooth and glossy skin, not scales, and live in damp areas close to ponds and vernal pools. Their appearance varies through their life cycles, starting at a dull greenish color with external, frilly gills as a hatchling and eventually growing into their classic spots. Despite the fact that these salamanders are quite widespread, they are often elusive and hard to find. They like to hide underground or beneath rocks, logs, and fallen root systems.

HABITAT

Spotted Salamanders are commonly found across Massachusetts and all along the eastern coast of the United States, even into parts of eastern Canada. They live in forested areas, typically found close to water sources like ponds, wetlands, and seasonal, vernal pools. They enjoy damp and hidden environments.

DIET & PREDATORS

Salamanders, like the spotted salamander, usually hunt at night. They are small predators who will eat just about anything they can catch, including worms, insects, slugs, snails, spiders, and small aquatic invertebrates. They catch prey with their long and sticky tongue.

Salamanders can be prey themselves, often hunted by skunks, raccoons, turtles, snakes, and other small mammals like chipmunks.

LIFE & BEHAVIOUR

Spotted salamanders start their lives in water as small nymphs with external gills. Mothers lay their eggs in early spring, often at the same time and location year after year. After a few weeks, more than 200 eggs will hatch and grow into juveniles. Juvenile salamanders live in water until they grow into adult size, then move onto land, where they can live for about 20 years.

If you live near water or wetlands, keep an eye out for these critters crossing the road on warm, rainy nights.

FUN FACT

Ancient myths believed salamanders were born in fire. However, they are actually born underwater!

In fact, some salamander eggs contain green algae. The algae produce oxygen for the young embryo in a symbiotic pairing.