

Have You Seen Me?



The Four-Toed Salamander, like the majority of salamander species, is unfamiliar to most. Its small size, secretive nature, and preference for boggy wetlands make it difficult for even seasoned biologists to find. When discovered, however, an up-close look reveals the distinguishing characteristics that make this species unique.

Averaging only two to three inches in length, the four-toed salamander is one of the smallest species occurring in Pennsylvania. The body and head coloration is generally reddish brown becoming grayish along the sides. The snout appears flattened, the upper surfaces of the legs and tail are bright, reddish orange and the belly is bright white with black spots. As the name implies, both front and hind limbs have four toes (most species have five toes on the hind legs). There's a sharp constriction separating the body from the tail allowing the tail to easily break off should a predator attack. Regeneration of the tail eventually occurs.

Four-toed salamanders are habitat specialists, preferring areas in an around boggy, forested wetlands where sphagnum moss is often present. They are almost always found under cover objects: rocks, logs, bark and other debris. One of the best times to find a four-toed salamander is in April during the breeding season, when they can sometimes be found crossing rural roads (in suitable habitat) during warm, rainy nights. They are very difficult to spot, however, so one must drive slowly!

Four-toed salamanders occur throughout Pennsylvania but are found in very spotty, localized areas due to their strict habitat requirements. Like so many other reptile and amphibian species, the four-toed salamander suffers from habitat loss primarily due to various human activities including farming, industrialization, and suburban sprawl. Wetland preservation is the key to conserving this unique little amphibian. It's listed as a species of special concern in Pennsylvania.

How you can help:

If you find a salamander you believe may be a Four-Toed Salamander, photograph the animal, document the place and time, and send in your report.

Identification Help:

To find more information on how to identify a Four-Toed , including photographs and more characteristics, please visit <http://paherps.com>

Reports:

Please send any information, reports, and photographs to Tim Maret of the Pennsylvania Herpetological Atlas. <http://paherpatlas.org>