

SMOOTH NEWT

Lissotriton vulgaris



Sometimes confused with a lizard

DESCRIPTION – The Smooth Newt grows to about 10cm in length and is a dull olive brown colour on the upper surface. The underside is yellow or orange and is speckled with a series of small dark spots of varying size. These spots are also present on the throat. During the breeding season the male Smooth Newt develops a wavy crest that runs from the back of the head to the tip of the tail. At the same time, he also develops fringes to the edges of his hind toes.

Females Smooth Newts lack the crest, conspicuous colour patterns and fringed toes of the male. However, the females usually show the throat spotting (somewhat reduced) and the presence of throat spots will always distinguish a female Smooth Newt from a female Palmate Newt. The larvae of the two species are very difficult to tell apart.

HABITAT- Although found in waterbodies associated with many different habitats, it is rare in more acidic pools, such as those found in acid heathlands, bogs and mires. Newts are mostly nocturnal. During the spring and summer months (March to June) adult newts may be seen in garden ponds, drainage ditches and lakes whilst they are breeding. Outside of the breeding season they can be found in a variety of habitats, including woodland, gardens and parks. During the summer, tadpoles may be seen in ponds.

After leaving the pond at the end of the breeding season, adult newts take up residence under logs and stones, in crevices of walls and in other similar places. They frequently hibernate in such places, some will bury themselves in the soil, or use underground cavities around the foundations of buildings. They will sometimes share their winter quarters with frogs and toads. Hibernation refugia can easily be created in your garden by placing piles of rocks, wood, and even pieces of carpet.

BREEDING – Newts start to return to their ponds in March. Newts have an elaborate courtship ritual in which the male “dances” in front of the female, waving his crest and showing off his fine colours. After mating, the female lays her eggs singly using her hind feet to fold the leaf of an underwater plant around each egg. Newt tadpoles hatch at about two weeks, miniatures of their parents, with feathery external gills. By the time they are ready to leave the pond in August, their numbers are much reduced. Some may remain in the pond for a further year before undergoing metamorphosis (transforming from tadpole to adult); this can happen if the food or oxygen supply is poor. After leaving the pond at the end of the breeding season, adult newts take up residence under logs and stones, in crevices of walls and in other similar places. They frequently hibernate in such places, some will bury themselves in the soil, or use underground cavities around the foundations of buildings. They will sometimes share their winter quarters with frogs and toads. Hibernation refugia can easily be created in your garden by placing piles of rocks, wood, and even pieces of carpet.

PREDATORS – Smooth Newts are mainly taken by fish. However, larger adult Great Crested Newts are also a threat. The larvae are also eaten by larger invertebrates such as water beetles.