



REPTILES AND AMPHIBIANS

CHEAT MOUNTAIN SALAMANDER

ABOUT

The Cheat Mountain Salamander (*Plethodon nettingi*) is similar in size to the Red-backed salamander – 3 to 4¾ inches (7½-12 cm) long - but is distinguished by its black or dark brown back, which is boldly marked with small silver or white flecks. The belly is dark gray to black in color and this salamander does not have a dorsal stripe. Its tail is about the same length as its body and has 17 or so vertical grooves along the side. Like other woodland salamanders, it eats small insects like mites, ants, beetles, and flies, and on damp evenings it forages along the forest floor amongst rocks and logs for food. Cheat Mountain Salamanders are most active at night in humid weather; otherwise remaining under cover of logs or rocks during the day. This species spends the winter underground where it stays above freezing, and depending on soil temperature, leaves winter refuge at the end of March or early April. Little is known about their breeding behavior, but pairs have been found together under rocks in both spring and autumn. The female usually lays 8-10 eggs, which are attached to the inside of a rotten log or the underside of a rock. In behavior unique to woodland salamanders, it seems she guards the eggs until they hatch. The young undergo their larval stage inside the egg, so when they hatch in late August or September they resemble mini adults. The young reach sexual maturity in three to four years and live approximately 20 years.

DID YOU KNOW?

Cheat Mountain Salamanders are only found in a small portion of the high Allegheny Mountains in eastern West Virginia. Originally it was thought that its range was limited to Cheat Mountain above 3,500 ft (1100 m), in Randolph and Pocahontas counties. Later studies in the 1970s and '80s identified populations in Pendleton and Tucker counties, and even more recently at the eastern edge of Grant County. This threatened salamander has decreased in population due to destruction of its original red spruce forest habitat, pollution, drought, forest storm damage, and competition with other salamanders, particularly its relative, the Red-backed Salamander. Even minor disturbances to its habitat – like the building of a hiking trail – pose a threat to this animal. However, both the salamander and its habitat are monitored and protected in Monongahela National Forest and Canaan Valley National Wildlife Refuge and the outlook for its survival is hopeful.

For more detailed information visit: www.npwrc.usgs.gov or www.wikipedia.org.

TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE

In which mountain range is the Cheat Mountain Salamander found?

- a) Rockies
- b) Tetons
- c) Allegheny
- d) Smokey

Answer is C.

