**California Newt**

*Taricha torosa*

**Scientific Name**
*Taricha torosa*

**Other Names**
Orange bellied newt, Coast Range newt

**Range**
The California coastline and coast range mountains from Mendocino county to San Diego, from sea level to 6,000 feet above sea level

**Habitat**
Wet forests, oak forests, chaparral, grasslands, drier chaparral, and oak woodland

**Description**
A stocky, medium-sized salamander with rough, grainy yellowish-brown to dark brown skin that turns pale yellow to orange on the underside. Aquatic larvae are light yellow above with two dark regular narrow bands on the back

**Diet**
In the wild: Invertebrates, eggs and larvae
In captivity: Invertebrates

**Average Size**
Length: 5 – 8 in.
Weight: 6 – 11 g.

**Lifespan**
In the wild: Unknown
In captivity: Estimated at over 20 years

**Offspring**
7 – 30 eggs

**Incubation**
14 – 52 days

**Larval Period**
7 months

**Sexual Maturity**
3 years of age

**Predators**
Birds, small carnivores, reptiles and spiders

**Population Status**
Not Threatened, California Dept. Fish/Game species of special concern

**Behavior**
This salamander species is considered terrestrial (land dwelling), except during breeding. They are diurnal (active in the daytime) and are often seen crawling over land searching for food. In some permanent bodies of water, adults retain their aquatic breeding phase characteristics and live in the water year-round. Terrestrial adults feed by extending their sticky tongue to capture prey while aquatic individuals merely open their mouths and suck their prey inside. Terrestrial newts summer in moist habitats under woody debris or in rock crevices and animal burrows, but can sometimes be seen wandering overland in moist conditions any time of the year.

Due to its toxicity, the California Newt has few natural predators. Garter Snakes are the most common with some species having developed a genetic resistance to the tetrodotoxin secreted by this newt. When threatened, this newt adopts a defensive pose by closing its eyes, extending its limbs to the sides and holding its tail straight out. This "unken reflex," as it is called, exposes its bright orange underside as a warning to potential predators.

**Reproduction and Breeding**
California Newt adults migrate from terrestrial locations to aquatic ones such as ponds, reservoirs, and sluggish pools in streams to breed. The season begins in late December to February, depending on rainfall amounts in the area. Migration may take several weeks and covers large distances of up to two miles. Individuals will move in large numbers to breeding sites during and after rains.

Newts have a strong homing instinct and typically return to the same breeding site each time they breed, with males arriving first and leaving last. Each sex begins the transformation into their aquatic phase once they enter the water. Their skin becomes smoother and lightens in color, and their tails enlarge and flatten to help them swim. Females develop smoother skin, but do not undergo as much change. Males patrol the edges of the breeding pond waiting for females to enter the water, and then struggle to hold on to them while other males attempt to do the same. After a period of amplexus, where the male clutches the female from above, the male deposits a spermatophore (sperm cell containing his genetic material) that the female picks up with her cloaca.

Females lay and attach three to six spherical egg masses to submerged vegetation, branches, or rocks depending on where they live. Southern populations tend to lay egg masses under rocks in quiet stream pools where northern and central populations will attach egg masses to vegetation. Once the eggs hatch, the larvae find cover and begin their relatively solitary lives. Larvae transform and begin to live on land at the end of the summer or in

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early fall. Complete metamorphosis takes about two weeks while the tail fin is absorbed and the gills are reduced. Transformed juveniles leave the water with adult coloration, characteristics and a trace of remaining gills. At this time, they cannot survive if they remain in the water. Juveniles leave the natal pond and travel overland where it is assumed they take refuge and do not return to the water until they breed.

**Conservation**

Although not widespread, the California Newt is doing relatively well in most of its range, especially in the Sierras and more northern locations. Southern California populations have suffered population declines due to habitat loss and alteration caused by human activity, and from introduced predatory mosquito fish, crayfish, and bullfrogs. In addition, breeding ponds have been destroyed for development, and stream pools used for breeding have been destroyed by sedimentation caused by wildfires. Due to a combination of these factors, some verified populations in San Diego County are now extinct.

**Amazing Facts**

The larvae are not poisonous and are preyed on by adult newts and other predators. Chemical cues from adult newts trigger larvae to seek cover.

California Newts produce three types of documented sounds: Clicks, squeaks, and whistles.

Two subspecies of *Taricha torosa* have been traditionally recognized: *T. t. torosa* (Californian newt), and *T. t. sierrae* (Sierra newt). In 2007, scientists determined that these two types of newt do indeed have distinct evolutionary lineages and merit recognition as separate species. The contact zone between these two species is the southern Sierra Nevada with a hybrid zone centered along the Kaweah River in Tulare County, CA.