

# HERPTILES OF P.E.I.

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## INTRODUCTION

The word herptile is used to cover the two animal classes of amphibians and reptiles. The number of species of herptiles living on Prince Edward Island is relatively small compared to the other two Maritime provinces. This can be explained by the difficulties these creatures would encounter in attempting to cross the salty waters of Northumberland Strait in order to colonize the Island. Nevertheless 4 salamander, 5 frog and toad, and 3 snake species are known to inhabit the province. No turtles have been recorded. Because herptiles and their distribution have not been well studied on P.E.I., it is quite possible that additional species exist. If you should discover a previously undocumented species, you could make a very useful contribution to the scientific knowledge of P.E.I. by reporting it at once to the Natural History Society for further verification.

In addition to natural habitats many amphibians and reptiles on P.E.I. make extensive use of man-made habitats. These include millponds and dams, quarry ponds left from road-fill activities, and roadside ditches. Amphibians are adversely affected by acid rain; their eggs don't develop below pH 4.

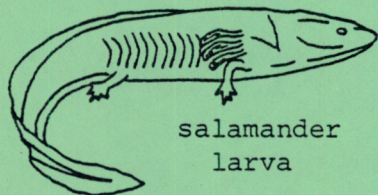
## PART I - THE SALAMANDERS

Salamanders belong to the class Amphibia, and are the only members of this group to have well developed tails as adults. Salamanders have no claws and never have more than four toes on their front feet. They are often confused with lizards, but salamanders have smooth moist skin while that of lizards is dry and scaly. (There are no lizards found on P.E.I.) At one time salamanders were believed to be able to survive fire, and their name comes from a mythical animal which was supposed to have the same abilities.

There are about 250 species of salamanders, most of which live in the Northern Hemisphere, particularly in North America. Very few salamanders inhabit the tropical regions or the Southern Hemisphere. Salamanders require moisture and seldom stray far from damp conditions. They are normally active at night, hiding underground by day in animal burrows, under stones or litter, in rotting logs or hollow trees. They are most often seen during the breeding season on mild damp spring nights when they travel to ponds to mate, or in the fall when they may show up in cellars while looking for a suitable site to hibernate for the winter.

Salamanders are carnivorous and will eat almost anything alive or dead which is small enough to swallow. Usual foods are insects, worms, grubs, aquatic larvae, crustaceans, molluscs, and other small creatures. Although they have no ears, their well developed sense of smell enables them to locate food successfully.

Eggs are laid in water singly, in strings or in jelly-coated clumps. The eggs hatch into a larva or tadpole. The salamander tadpole is distinguished from a frog tadpole by the three gills on each side of the head which remain throughout the larval stage. A frog tadpole has only two gills on each side of the head but these are lost soon after hatching. Salamander larvae eventually transform into adult stages and



either move to land or remain in the water. In some salamander species eggs are laid in moist soil and hatch into immature forms called efts. These may remain on land for several years before returning to the water as adult newts. However for most species it is the immature stage which lives in the water and the adult which lives on the land.