

eastern red-backed salamander *Plethodon cinereus*

Kingdom: Animalia

Division/Phylum: Chordata

Class: Amphibia

Order: Caudata

Family: Plethodontidae

ILLINOIS STATUS common, native

FEATURES

The eastern red-backed salamander averages two and one-fourth to four inches in length. It has a long tail. The belly has a "salt and pepper" look. There are two color variations in this animal: the red-backed has a straight, rust-colored stripe down the back and tail (stripe may be orange, yellow or light gray) while the lead-back has a black or brown appearance on the back. The stripe narrows as it reaches the tip of the tail. The body is long and slender with thin legs.

BEHAVIORS

The eastern red-backed salamander lives in moist woodlands under rocks or rotten logs or in rotten stumps. When conditions are dry, it moves under ground. It is nocturnal. Breeding occurs in fall, with eggs deposited in rotten logs or under bark. Hatching occurs in late summer. The newly hatched larva is attached to a yolk sac for a day or so after hatching. After this time, the gills disappear, and hatchlings are terrestrial, which is different than in most other amphibian species. They remain terrestrial as adults. The red-backed salamander feeds on worms, sowbugs, centipedes and spiders.

HABITATS

Aquatic Habitats

bottomland forests

Woodland Habitats

bottomland forests

Prairie and Edge Habitats

none

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