

# CALIFORNIA TIGER SALAMANDER

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## STATUS

Common name: California tiger salamander  
Scientific name: *Ambystoma californiense*  
State status: Species of Special Concern  
Federal status: Threatened



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## NATURAL HISTORY

The California tiger salamander is a large terrestrial salamander reaching up to 8 inches. Their backs and sides are black in color with white or pale yellow spots or bars, while their bellies vary from uniform white or pale yellow to a multicolored pattern of white or pale yellow and black.

California tiger salamanders are terrestrial and inhabit grasslands and oak savanna habitats in the valleys and low hills of central and Northern California. They require vernal pools, ponds (natural or man-made), or semi-permanent calm waters (where ponded water is present for a minimum of three to four months) for breeding and larval maturation, and adjacent upland areas that contain small mammal burrows or other suitable refugia for aestivation. California tiger salamanders will utilize permanent ponds but only if aquatic vertebrate predators such as bullfrogs and fish are not present. They will use both occupied and unoccupied burrows but require an active population of small burrowing mammals to maintain the burrows.

Adults spend most of their lives underground in small mammal burrows, typically those of Beechey's (California) ground squirrels (*Spermophilus beecheyi*), as well as in crevices in the soil or beneath downed logs. Thus, they are rarely seen except during nocturnal breeding migrations that begin with the first seasonal rains in November and December. Adults emerge from underground retreats to feed, court, and breed during warm winter rains that typically persist through March. Adults may migrate long distances, up to a kilometer or more, to reach pools for breeding and egg laying.

## THREATS TO THE SPECIES

1. Loss of small vernal pools, especially the degradation of complexes of long lasting pools
2. Fragmentation of known breeding sites, including migration barriers between upland aestivation sites and breeding ponds
3. Introduction of predatory fishes (including mosquito fish for mosquito control), bullfrogs, and/or Louisiana crayfish into pools used by the tiger salamander
4. Vehicular-related mortality especially during breeding migrations
5. Rodent control programs which lead to loss of aestivation habitats



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