

# River Bend Naturalist Notebook

at

**RIVER BEND NATURE CENTER, Faribault Minnesota**

Illustrations by MOE BRAND • Text by Cailin Orr, Intern Naturalist



## Tiger Salamander

*Ambystoma tigrinum*

The tiger salamander is the largest land dwelling salamander in the world. It can be distinguished from the other five species of salamanders in Minnesota by its thick body, large head and small eyes. The tiger salamander has a dark green to black back with yellow spots that appear in a variety of patterns. It is typically 7-13 inches long and has smooth, damp skin. The larval form is a yellow-brown color with external gills and may reach full size before transforming into an adult.

These common salamanders have a range that covers most of the US and most of Minnesota. Habitat includes marshes, ponds, springs, lakes, and prairie wetlands. They are most likely to be seen on land as they migrate

between their winter home in upland habitat and summer breeding ponds. Migration occurs in early spring and early fall on humid, overcast days and at night.

These amphibians seem like docile creatures when handled, but they are actually surprisingly resourceful carnivores. Their diet contains worms, grasshoppers, and snails, as one might expect, but also includes fish, tadpoles, small mice, baby birds, and even their own larvae.

Salamanders spend cold days and long winter months in underground burrows dug beneath the frost line. Some individuals do their own digging and some move into the abandoned homes of species such as crayfish, squirrels, and mice.