Woodland Pool Wildlife

a photo identification guide

This guide includes the main group of animals that depends on woodland pools for breeding (mole salamanders, wood frogs, and fairy shrimp), and a number of other wildlife species that may be observed in pools. More comprehensive guides to wildlife, vernal pools, and wetland plants may be needed to identify the rich diversity of life that thrives in this habitat.

Mole Salamanders
(pool-breeding salamanders in the family Ambystomatidae that spend much of their time underground)

**spotted salamander**
*Ambystoma maculatum*

- Gray to black with yellow spots in 2 rows along back.
- Size: adult length is usually 5.0-8.0 inches in total length (TL)
- Eggs: firm masses of 50-200 eggs, attached to twigs or stems; clear or white

**Jefferson salamander**
*Ambystoma jeffersonianum*

- Gray to brown with pale blue to white flecked underside.
- Size: adult length is usually 4.0-7.0 inches in TL, large and robust
- Eggs: masses of 20-30 eggs, often sausage-shaped

**blue-spotted salamander**
*Ambystoma laterale*

- Coloring resembles enamelware pots, black with blue-silver flecks.
- Size: adult length is usually 3.0-5.0 inches in TL, slender bodied
- Eggs: laid singly, in small clusters, or in sheets on pool bottom

**NOTE** Hybrids of Jefferson and blue-spotted salamanders are common and have features of both species.

**marbled salamander**
*Ambystoma opacum*

- Dark with silver-gray (females) to white (males) bands on back.
- Size: adult length is usually 3.5-4.0 inches in TL, stout bodied
- Eggs: between 50-200 laid in fall in dry pool bed

Outreach on woodland pool conservation is part of a larger NYSDEC Hudson River Estuary Program initiative to partner with local communities to conserve the diversity of plants, animals, and habitats that sustain the health and resiliency of the entire estuary watershed. For more information, visit [http://www.dec.ny.gov/lands/52325.html](http://www.dec.ny.gov/lands/52325.html) or [https://hudson.dnr.cals.cornell.edu/](https://hudson.dnr.cals.cornell.edu/).
Wood frog
*Rana sylvatica*

Orange to dark brown with dark "mask" from each eye to tympanum.
Size: adult length is usually 1.5-3.0 inches
Eggs: > 1,000 in a 2.5-4.0 inch diameter mass, often laid communally in "rafts."

Fairy shrimp
*C: BRANCHIPODA O: ANOSTRACA*

Orange to green, swim upside down in pools from late winter to early spring.
Size: adult length is usually 0.5-1.5 inches
Eggs: carried in a brood pouch, eventually released.

**Signs of Pool Breeding**

The presence of spermatophores, egg masses, and developing amphibians in woodland pools is a good indication of breeding activity.

- **Spermatophores** are tiny "sperm packets" left by males on the bottom of pools. By Mike Rubbo
- **Jefferson salamander egg masses** are often long and attached to vegetation. By Laura Heady
- **Wood frog larva**e hatch early and are often the only frog tadpoles seen in pools in the spring. By Laura Heady

Wood frog egg masses do not have an outer matrix like salamander egg masses. By Laura Heady

Spotted salamander egg masses are very firm. By Laura Heady

Salamander larvae have external gills, unlike frog larvae. By Laura Heady

**More Woodland Pool Wildlife**

The following group includes wildlife species that may use woodland pools for foraging, resting, and/or breeding in addition to using other habitat types.

- **spotted turtle** by Mike Rubbo
- **spring peeper** by Ray Sussmann
- **American toad** by Laura Heady
- **four-toed salamander** by Laura Heady
- **Blanding's turtle*** by Jaime Hazard
- **spadefoot toad** by Jaime W. Jaycox

*B* in the Hudson Valley, limited to Dutchess county.

**red-spotted newt** by Laura Heady

**wood duck** by Mike Pogue

**For more wildlife information:** *The Amphibians and Reptiles of New York State* (Gibbs et al. 2007)

*A Field Guide to the Animals of Vernal Pools* (Kenney and Burne 2001).