Marbled Salamander

Ambystoma opacum

These beautiful salamanders are common residents of Carolina bays, river floodplains and other wetlands in the Southeast. Marbled salamanders have striking patterns of white, silver, or gray bands on a dark ground color. Individuals are rarely more than five inches long from head to tail tip. They feed on small invertebrates including earthworms, a variety of insects, and even centipedes. According to researcher David Scott from the Savannah River Ecology Lab (SREL), marbled salamanders have been known to live as long as ten years in the wild. He has found that marbled salamanders on the Savannah River Site lay an average of 80 to 120 eggs under logs or in clumps of vegetation in wetland areas that are likely to flood in late autumn. When the fall and winter rains fill these wetlands and flood the salamander nests, the eggs hatch and the larvae begin to grow and develop. After 3-6 months the larvae metamorphose into solid gray salamanders. As they mature they develop the bold silver pattern on their bodies. Males have a lighter-colored pattern than females. Adult marbled salamanders live in the woods around the wetland and return to the water to breed and lay eggs.

Marbled salamanders, like many other amphibians, require **wetlands** to use as breeding sites and nearby forests to live in the rest of their lives. SREL researchers have collected and released as many as twelve thousand salamanders emerging from a single wetland in a 24-hr period. Some small wetlands (and surrounding forests) may be home to more than 100,000 salamanders! Many of our wetlands in the East have been destroyed or heavily altered to the point where amphibians cannot survive in them. By studying amphibians and the wetlands they live in, we will better understand the role that salamanders and other amphibians play in the ecology of our area.

Female salamander with eggs

Salamander larva

This information is provided by **Savannah River Ecology Laboratory Outreach** *and* **SPARC**.

Photos by David Scott