



## *Reptile & Amphibian Residents of the Nature Center*

### **Speckle and Spartacus the Tiger Salamanders**

#### **Personal History:**

Our Tiger Salamanders were donated to the Nature Center in 1998 by a Masters student from U. C. Davis. The salamanders had been collected as eggs or larvae for use in a study under Fish and Game regulations. In the course of the study, the salamanders may have been exposed to toxins from hatchery fish, so they could not be released to the wild and were delegated for educational use. Because they are seldom seen in their wild state, they provide an unusual educational experience for Nature Center visitors.



#### **Natural History: California Tiger Salamander (*Ambystoma tigrinum californiense*)**

**Description:** A large, stocky salamander 3-12 inches long, with small eyes, and broad rounded snout. They are black with spots and bars of white, cream, or yellow. These animals are secretive and are seldom seen because they spend most of their time hidden underground to retain moisture.

**Habitat:** The California Tiger Salamander lives in annual grassland or in the grassy understory of valley-foothill woodlands. Adults live in the underground burrows of small mammals or man-made underground structures for most of the year. Before and after breeding, they come out at night during rains, and may be found under surface objects such as rocks and logs. Aquatic larvae hide in vegetation and debris in the water.

**Feeding:** Juveniles and adults are “sit and wait” predators, eating earthworms, snails, insects and fish. Aquatic larvae feed on aquatic insects and mollusks.

**Reproduction:** Adults emerge from their burrows during the first rains (usually in November) and migrate to breeding ponds or vernal pools. Streams are seldom used. Breeding and egg laying normally occur from December to early February. Small clusters of one to over 100 eggs are laid on submerged plants and debris. An individual female may lay up to 1000 eggs in a season. The greenish aquatic larvae that emerge from the eggs have gills with fringed elongations called “rakes”, and wide tails that are flattened on the vertical plane. Larvae transform to juvenile salamanders during late spring or early summer, then migrate away from the pond to underground burrows.

**General Information:** Larvae are fed upon by larger aquatic animals, predatory fish

and wading birds. Adults are not heavily preyed upon due to their secretive behavior and brief activity periods. Rainfall is extremely important to the formation of breeding ponds and successful salamander migrations. The California Tiger Salamander is listed by the Dept. of Fish and Game as a species of concern because their populations are declining due to habitat loss.