

## Mole salamanders live underground

The spring ponds of Halton Hills host not only vociferous congregations of breeding frogs, but multitudes of salamanders as well. The discovery of these quiet creatures, however, takes a little more effort than locating the frogs.

The earliest breeding salamanders in our area are species of the mole salamander family. At least three species of this family are found in this part of Ontario: the Yellow Spotted, the Blue Spotted and the Jefferson's Salamander. The latter two species have interbred in the past and have produced - strange as it may seem - two all female hybrids, considered by some scientists to be separate species.

### Backyard Naturalist

By DON SCALLEN  
Herald Special



This family of salamanders is called "mole" because they live underground during the non-breeding part of the year. They generally retreat deep under the forest litter, where they forage for worms, grubs and other subterranean food fare. Because of this underground lifestyle, mole

salamanders are seldom encountered outside of their short breeding period, though they may surface after a torrential summer downpour.

The striking Yellow-Spotted Salamander is probably the most familiar of this family. Reaching a length of 200 mm or 9", this amphibian is black above, with two rows of bright yellow spots on its back. They migrate to the ponds shortly after the ice has melted in the spring, a journey that is undertaken at night and often over a considerable distance. After mating, the female Yellow-Spotted lays a gelatinous egg mass usually containing from 100 to 200 eggs. The eggs hatch in one to two months and the larval salamanders remain at the ponds another two to four months before they metamorphose into adults. Unlike frog tadpoles that feed primarily on plant material, (with the exception of Wood Frog tadpoles), salamander larvae are wholly carnivorous. They dart about on the pond bottom feeding on a variety of aquatic insects and frog and toad tadpoles.

Another common mole salamander in Halton Hills is the Blue-Spotted Salamander. These salamanders are lovely little creatures, their black bodies adorned with bright blue flecks. The larvae of this species are highly visible in June and July in the woodland ponds of the escarpment. As with other salamander larvae, they can be distinguished from tadpoles by the presence of external gills and large mouths.

Another mole salamander that probably inhabits Halton Hills is the Jefferson's Salamander, similar to the Blue Spotted, but larger and duller in colouration. As mentioned previously, Jefferson's and Blue Spotted Salamanders have interbred and produced two all female hybrids. Only recently discovered and described, these hybrids are known as the Tremblay's and the Silvery Salamander. They are considered by most authorities to be separate species, but are still the objects of much study and speculation. To produce young, the Tremblay species mates with Blue Spotted males and the Silvery mates with Jefferson males, but in each case, none of the males' genetic material is transmitted - the resulting offspring are all female and presumably identical copies of the mother. All four of these interesting species have been identified near Halton Hills.

Two other families of salamander inhabit north Halton - the lungless salamanders, represented by the abundant Redback and the uncommon Four-Toed, and the newts, represented by the Red-Spotted Newt. The habits of these three species will be explored in future columns.

## Easter sunrise service

St. John's United Church, Georgetown and Glen Williams began Lenten services with a special Ash Wednesday service on March 4 in the Georgetown church. We are grateful to St. George's Anglican Church for providing the ashes prepared from last year's Palm branches.

During Holy week, we will hold evening services in the Glen Church at 7 p.m. On Thursday, April 16, we will have a "Seder" meal in the Glen hall at 5:45 p.m., followed by Holy Communion in the Glen Sanctuary. The "Seder" or Passover meal is the basis of the communion service. If you would like to attend, call Janet Duval at 877-1994 or Hilda Darcie at 877-9708. The Good Friday service will be held at 10 a.m. in the church in Georgetown.

The annual Easter Sunrise Service will take place at 7 a.m. in the Glen Williams cemetery, followed by breakfast at St. John's, Glen Williams. The regular Easter services will take place at 9:30 a.m. in the Glen church and at 11 a.m. in the Georgetown church.

Everyone is invited to attend these services.

### Chloride purchase

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