

Ensatina

Ensatina eschscholtzii Family Plethodontidae



Global Rank: G5

State Rank: S2S3 (CA); S5 (OR, WA)

Distribution: Ranges from southwestern British Columbia, south along the Coastal, Cascade, and Sierra Nevada Mountains to the Transverse and Peninsular ranges of southern California and extreme northern Baja California. At least five subspecies known, most of which are in California. Extends from about sea level to around 8,000 ft. (2,440 m.) in elevation.

Description: Adults reach up to 4 in. (10 cm.) in total length. The ensatina is a smooth-skinned salamander with 12-13 costal grooves and a swollen tail, constricted at the base. The defensive posture is characteristic; it stands stiff-legged and sway backed with its tail arched. Color varies greatly, but nearly all have yellow or orange limb bases. Adult males have an enlarged upper lip and the tail is longer and slimmer than in females.

Reproduction: Courtship and egg-laying can occur from fall through spring. Eggs are laid in leaf litter, logs, or rodent burrows. The female



Current range of the ensatina

broods the eggs until they hatch. Young emerge with the fall rains. The average clutch size is 11 eggs (range 5-16).

Food: Diet consists of small arthropods such as spiders, springtails, beetles, mites, termites, and ticks. Larger individuals will take earthworms and snails as well.

Habits: *Ensatina*s are found under logs, rocks, or other debris on forest and woodland floors. Although they require moist microhabitats, they are not associated with open water. Densities of up to three individuals per square meter have been observed near Portland, Oregon.

Management Implications: This species can be quite abundant in appropriate habitats. No known threats to survival of the species. As a defense against predators, the *ensatina* secretes a white, poisonous mucus along the top of the tail when disturbed. This is the only species in the genera.

Important References: Stebbins, R.C. 1985. A field guide to western reptiles and amphibians. The Peterson Field Guide Series, Houghton Mifflin Company, New York, NY; Csuti, B. A.J. Kimerling, T.A. O'Neil, M.M. Shaughnessy, E.P. Gaines, and M.M.P. Huso. 1997. Atlas of Oregon wildlife. Oregon State University Press, Corvallis, OR.