

Northwestern Salamander by Matthew Shirley

The Northwestern Salamander is one of the eight species of salamander that can be commonly found in and around the Willapa Bay National Wildlife Refuge. Willapa bay is home to the largest variety of amphibians in Washington, with fourteen out of twenty-four native species of amphibian calling it home.

They eat a variety of prey, particularly small invertebrates, caught underwater or underground, as well as insect and frog eggs. They avoid predation themselves through stealth, and a mild poison that manifests as larvae. When threatened, they raise their tails and butt heads to spread a sticky white poison from glands behinds its eyes. Even introduced species, like the bullfrog, have learned to leave it alone. In medieval lore, it was feared a salamander's breath was so potent that it could poison all the fruit on a tree merely by walking on the bark. The salamander requires a dark and moist environment, and fallen logs near freshwater streams are a favorite. This habit sparked the myth that salamanders and newts were either immune to flame, or in fact born from it, as they would "miraculously" appear from logs thrown on to the fire.

Its perceived connection to elemental fire tied them to many magical recipes and ideas. "Eye of Newt," for example, is an old term for the fiery mustard seed. Legendary, fireproof garments woven from "salamander wool" adorned Pope Alexander III, among other historic figures, and were likely made from asbestos.

The Northwestern Salamander is a common sight after spring rains in the refuge, and along Washington's coast line.