

## SPECIES OF THE WEEK



Smooth Newt

*Lissotriton vulgaris*

Smooth Newts or Common Newts are Ireland's only native newt species. They are native to most of Europe and western Asia with the exception of the Iberian Peninsula and southern France. In Ireland they are very widely distributed and can be found in most areas provided the space is damp including grasslands, woodlands, bogs, fields and gardens. Gardens have become an increasingly important habitat due to levels of pollution in rivers and streams.

An adult Smooth Newt can grow up to 10cm and has a brown back and yellowy orange underside. They also have black spots on their underside however this is more pronounced in males. Males tend to be more colourful, and undergo dramatic physical changes during the mating season. During this time, the male develops a tall, thin and wavy crest that runs down their spine and tail. Using his tail, the male will attempt to attract a female by engaging in a courtship dance. He swims in front of the female and wiggles his tail and waves his legs to win her attention. If she's impressed then she will mate with him.

While most people assume Smooth Newts spend all their time in water, they only remain in the water to breed. Like all amphibians, they need a freshwater source to reproduce. But besides the mating season they spend most of their time on land. Once she has mated, the female must have vegetation in order to lay her eggs. She will attach the eggs to the leaves of underwater plants and can lay up to 400 in a breeding season.

Smooth Newts, like all amphibians, have separate and distinct life stages that they go through on the way to becoming an adult. This process is called Metamorphosis and is very common in nature. Many different types of animals undergo metamorphosis as well as amphibians including insects, crustaceans and some kinds of fish. The most well known example is a caterpillar transforming into a butterfly. These processes are triggered and controlled by different levels of hormones in the animals body and can depend on different environmental factors like temperature. Newt tadpoles will take longer to develop in colder conditions than in warmer conditions. Metamorphosis brings significant advantages as it causes a change in diet and behaviour. This means that adults will not have to compete with juveniles for space and food.