**Photo Credit: Amphibian Information Centre*

Alpine Newt *(Ichthyosaura alpestris)*

Blue Mountaine Beauties

The Alpine newt is a medium sized to large, terrestrial to aquatic newt species. Color and appearance of this species can be highly variable depending on the sex, age, life stage, substrate, and/or overall health. During the breeding and reproductive season, males tend to be the most vividly colored and patterned individuals, sporting a low dorsal crest with black and yellow barring, and a slate gray to bluish-gray ground color with a pale whitish-yellow band on the lower flanks with dark spots. The belly is usually an un-patterned yellow to orange. Females and juveniles are less vivid in appearance, and may be brownish to grayish mottled. As with many newt species, Alpine newts breed and reproduce in temporary ponds, wetlands, or other waterbodies in the spring or early summer, and live terrestrially (on land) for the rest of the year outside of the reproductive season.

Taxonomy

Life: All living, physical, and animate entities
Domain: Eukaryota
Kingdom: Animalia
Phylum/Sub Phylum: Chordata/Vertebrata
Class: Amphibia
Order: Caudata/Urodela
Suborder: Salamandroidea
Family: Salamandridae
Genus: Ichthyosaura
Species: *Ichthyosaura alpestris**
**Taxonomy subject to change and revision.*

Lifespan and Longevity

Captive longevity is uncertain, but potentially up to 5 years or more. They can attain longevity of 10 to 15 years in the wild.

Distribution and Habitat

These newts are indigenous to the hilly, mountainous and deciduous forest regions of much of central and southern Europe with surrounding temporary ponds, pools, slow moving streams and rivers, ditches, and other temporary, ephemeral bodies of water or wetlands. Specifically within this range, Alpine newts may be found in extreme northern Spain, to France, Belgium, Germany, Austria, Poland, the Ukraine, and Romania to northern Italy.

Origin/History

Ichthyosaura alpestris (Laurenti, 1768).

Unfortunately, there is not much specific information or history behind when alpine newts first were imported or kept in the U.S. or other overseas pet industry, although they likely have been for many decades. However, in 2016, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service would amend its regulations under the Lacey Act to create an interim rule adding all species of salamanders from 20 genera, of which there are 201 species, to the list of injurious amphibians. This was due to efforts to prevent the introduction, establishment, and spread of the chytrid fungus Batrachochytrium salamandrivorans (or Bsal) into ecosystems of the United States.

With this interim rule, both importation into the United States and interstate transportation between States, the District of Columbia, the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico, or any territory or possession of the United States of any live or dead specimen, including parts, of these 20 genera of salamanders would be prohibited, except by permit for zoological, educational, medical, or scientific purposes. This rule would most certainly impact the U.S. herpetoculture industry and pet trade when it came to its reliance on importing this, and many other of its caudate (salamander and newt) species into the U.S.

Experience Level Required
Intermediate/Moderate.

Size
Depending on the life stage, sex, and species, Alpine newts typically range in size from 3.5 to 4.5 inches in total snout-to-tail length, although some individuals or populations from higher altitudes can attain larger sizes. Average snout-to-vent length ranges from about 1.5 to 1.64 inches SVL.

Housing and Enclosure Plus Temperature, Lighting, and Humidity
Enclosure System: Aquatic to Moist-Terrestrial. Alpine newts can be hardy and robust newt species that tolerate a wide variety of environments, and can be housed either in terrestrial or aquatic setups as simple or complex as one prefers. Housing must be sealed and escape proof with a secured top or aquarium hood. A 15 to 20 gallon aquarium, terrarium, or other enclosure is suitable for these newts. They can also be kept communally in proportionally larger housing. The aquatic enclosure should consist of a primarily aquatic setup with a floating platform or other dry area these newts can resort to on a sand, gravel, or bare substrate. An appropriate filter can be used to help maintain water clarity and cleanliness, but conditions should still be kept as still/stagnant as possible as they do not tolerate fast flowing conditions. Also provide ample hiding opportunities in the aquarium using live or artificial planted or floating plants and rocks, or pieces of broken clay pipe. Enclosures should be spot cleaned, sterilized, and water cleaned and changed regularly every 1 to 2 weeks and water temperatures should be kept at around 50 to 65 degrees F in order to maintain these newts in their aquatic stages. Do not exceed water temperatures of 72 to 73 degrees F for this species. These newts can also be found in a wide range of depths, although a minimum water depth of 6 to 8 inches or more will suffice. Alternatively, these newts can be allowed to occupy terrestrial setups but should not be allowed to become too dry or too wet, and adequate ventilation should be provided. They should be kept in a moist terrestrial setup of similar proportions consisting of a moist, chemical and pesticide free potting soil, peat or sphagnum moss, or damp paper towels that should be misted and cleaned regularly. Additional pieces of cork bark, log hides, or rock hides should also provide additional cover for these terrestrial phases of newts. A large, shallow water dish or pan should also be provided in the terrestrial setups as well to help prevent desiccation or drying out. More specific lighting, heating, and humidity product suggestions and recommendations that can best suit one's needs, as well as those of one's animals can be given as well. Humidity is not applicable for aquatic newts, while humidity for terrestrial phases should be kept high, at 90 to

100%.

Feeding, Diet, and Nutrition

Insectivorous to Carnivorous; Alpine newts are largely carnivorous and opportunistic feeders in the wild, feeding on small fish and fish eggs, a wide variety of insects, arthropods, worms, crustaceans, and other invertebrates. In captivity, these newts are easily fed, and can readily be given chopped nightcrawlers, worms, isopods, feeder crickets, roaches, waxworms, and mealworms at least two to three times weekly, with this being their recommended feeding frequency. Any feeder insects should also be gut loaded and dusted with additional calcium and vitamin D3 supplements as well prior to feeding to ensure optimal nutrition and health. More specific dietary and supplementary product suggestions and recommendations that can best suit one's needs, as well as those of one's animals can be given as well.

Handling

As with most amphibians, Alpine newts are fragile animals, and handling should be done carefully or avoided and kept to a minimum whenever possible. Terrestrial phases or specimens should also be handled carefully as well, since most terrestrial newt species also have irritating, potentially toxic tetrodotoxins. Ideally, an aquarium net of appropriate size can be used to move aquatic caudates whenever necessary. All amphibians breathe and respire through their skin, as well as absorb water through this means. It is therefore important to avoid wearing any chemicals or lotions on your hands, which can be potentially harmful or even fatal to amphibians. It is also important to wash or rinse hands thoroughly, and ensure they are adequately moistened before and after handling any amphibians in order to prevent them from drying out.
Also be sure to practice basic cleanliness and hygiene associated with proper husbandry after touching or handling any animals or animal enclosures to prevent the possibility of contracting salmonellosis or any other zoonotic pathogens

Contact

Authored by Eric Roscoe. For any additional questions, comments, and/or concerns regarding this animal, group of animals, or this care sheet, please email and contact:
Eric.S.Roscoe@gmail.com