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## Paddletail Newts (*Pachytriton* spp.)

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### **Broad Tailed Giants**

Paddletail newts are large, stocky bodied newt species indigenous to the cool, freshwater streams of southeastern China. Two species are most well known in the pet trade, the Spotted Paddletail Newt (*Pachytriton brevipes*) and Paddletail Newt (*Pachytriton labiatus*). These newts are large, stocky bodied species ranging in color from dark brown, brownish gray, to olive gray with a ventral, or belly surface consisting of reddish, reddish brown, reddish orange, to brown mottling. A row of reddish spots and stripes is also present along their tail and bodies. Some sources, however, place *P. labiatus* into a separate genus, *Paramesotriton*, or the Asian Warty Newts.

The Spotted Paddletail Newt (*P. brevipes*) tends to be a lighter brown, reddish brown, to orangish brown with numerous dark spots, streaks, or mottling present. The heads of both species are broad and flattened, and the tails are broad, laterally flattened, and paddle like, hence their common name. Paddletail newts are apt swimmers, and use their large, paddle-like tails for propulsion through the water. These newts are almost exclusively aquatic, unlike many other newt species, although they sometimes will leave the water in search of new habitat due to habitat loss, overcrowding, or competition for resources.

### **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:** *Pachytriton*

**Species:** *Pachytriton* spp.\*

\*Taxonomy subject to change and revision.

### **Lifespan and Longevity**

If provided the proper care, paddletail newts can attain longevity of 5 to 10 years or more.

### **Distribution and Habitat**

The paddletail newts are a genus of large, primarily aquatic newts indigenous to southern, central, and southeastern China. Within this range, these newts are found in highly specialized

habitats, including clear, swift, or fast flowing rivers, streams, and other well oxygenated bodies of water. These small ranges for these species are further threatened by pollution and human encroachment.

### **Origin/History**

*Pachytriton brevipes* (Sauvage, 1876); *Paramesotriton labiatus* (Unterstein, 1930).

Despite their popularity as pets, there is little hard data or history on these newts in the pet trade, and many unknown types and new species show up in the pet trade. For instance, a complex of three or four additional unnamed species come from unknown locales, and are known only from animals imported from the pet trade (Caudata.org).

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**

Paddletail newts are large species of newts which average between 5.0 and 8.1 inches in total snout-to-tail length. Adult males range from about 2.7 to 3.9 inches in snout-to-vent length (SVL), while adult females reach 3.0 to 4.3 inches in snout-to-vent length (SVL).

### **Housing and Enclosure**

***Enclosure System: Primarily Aquatic.*** Both species of paddletail newts are predominately aquatic and require the appropriate aquatic setup. Housing must be sealed and escape proof with a secured top or aquarium hood. A minimum of 5 to 10 gallon aquarium, terrarium, or other enclosure is suitable per one of these newts. Fine grain sand or gravel can be used as a substrate, but must not be easily ingestible by these newts. Alternatively, a bare bottom, or no substrate can be utilized. In their natural ranges, these newts can be highly territorial and aggressive towards other newts, and thus should not be housed together or communally. This includes any other newt or salamander species, and any fish. The enclosure should consist of a primarily aquatic setup with an appropriate filter that can be used to help maintain water clarity and cleanliness. Also provide ample hiding opportunities and other cage décor and furnishings in the aquarium using live plants and rocks, PVC pipes, or clay flower pots, or other commercially available aquatic hides. Enclosures should be spot cleaned, sterilized, and water cleaned and changed regularly every 1 to 2 weeks. A partial water change and periodic aeration of 10 to 20% is recommended weekly in this regard.

### **Temperature, Lighting, and Humidity**

Paddletail newts prefer cooler temperatures below 65 degrees, although they can tolerate temperatures in the low to mid 70's, such as 70 to 75 degrees F, but not for prolonged periods. Paddletail newts have simple and undemanding heating and lighting requirements in captivity, and do not require additional UVA/UVB lighting, although providing it in moderated amounts can be greatly beneficial for their health, immune system, and overall wellness. For any supplemental heating that may be needed, use a low wattage incandescent or UVA/UVB bulb, radiant or ceramic heat emitter, submersible water heater, or UTH (under tank heating element). They are susceptible to health and husbandry related issues if water temperatures are too cold or too warm for these unusual amphibians. 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 these primarily aquatic newt species.

### **Feeding, Diet, and Nutrition**

***Insectivorous to Carnivorous***; Paddletail newts are largely opportunistic feeders in the wild, feeding on small fish, a wide range of invertebrates, and carrion. Paddletail newts feed using a method known as suction feeding, or buccal pumping, and should thus be provided adequately sized food items. Food items that are readily accepted by these amphibians can include earthworms, waxworms, bloodworms, small feeder crickets and roaches, mealworms, silkworms, or other feeder insects as well as commercially available diets and fish pellets. Recommended feeding is two to three times weekly. 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, Paddletail newts are fragile and sensitive animals, and handling should be done carefully or avoided and kept to a minimum whenever possible. 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:

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