

Local Amphibians Provide an Educational Opportunity

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On 5 February 2017, after the recent rains, we went for a walk in the neighborhood *Eucalyptus* forest. There were a few cover boards scattered along the trail and we were eager to lift them to discover the surprises underneath. Upon lifting one of the boards, we saw what looked like large dark earthworms, but after a closer look we soon realized that these “earthworms” were actually salamanders. Our daughter was in attendance and she was quick to mention that she wanted to hold it so we gently scooped one up to examine it. She had a few questions about their ecology and ended by asking if she could take it home with her. However, we soon agreed to leave it under its shelter because we didn’t want to separate it from its home. Little is known about their dietary requirements and we should keep the population healthy by not removing individuals. We lifted a few more boards and found a total of three individuals. We also found a *Scolopendra* centipede.

We were not entirely clear what species of salamander we found so when we returned to the house we consulted Sloan (1963). Although a rather dated publication, it’s a great resource for the amphibians of San Diego County. Indeed, we found our salamander in northern San Diego County near Camp Pendleton. Sloan (1963) provided an identification of South-



A young biologist admiring her first salamander encounter, the Garden Slender Salamander (*Batrachoseps major major*). Photo by Howard Clark.

ern Slender Salamander (*Batrachoseps attenuatus leucopus*), which was a good start in narrowing down its current Latin name. After consulting Stebbins and McGinnis (2012) and Lemm (2006) we finally figured it was a Garden Slender Salamander (*Batrachoseps major major*; Plethodontidae, Lungless Salamanders; Camp 1915), which is fairly common throughout coastal Southern California within oak woodlands, canyon bottoms, and lower mountain slopes, as well as in yards as gardens, as the common name suggests. The species was our daughter’s first salamander encounter and a new life species for us. We were thrilled to discover new wildlife species literally in our backyard! We encourage others to explore local habitats and learn about native flora and fauna, but please be sure to place the critters back where you found them and replace cover items in their proper position.

Literature Cited

Camp, C.L. 1915. *Batrachoseps major* and *Bufo cognatus californicus*, new Amphibia from southern California. University of California Publications in Zoology 12:327-334.

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Stebbins, R.C., and S.M. McGinnis. 2012. Field Guide to Amphibians and Reptiles of California. Revised Edition. California Natural History Guides. University of California Press, Berkeley, CA. 538 pp.

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Garden Slender Salamanders (*Batrachoseps m. major*) as found under coverboards, San Diego Co., CA. Photos by Howard Clark.