

NOTE ON OTTAWA SALAMANDERS.

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Vertebrate animals are usually arranged by naturalists in five classes—mammals, birds, reptiles, amphibians and fishes. To the fourth of these divisions the salamanders belong. They have the general form of lizards, an elongated body, four feet, and a long tail; but their body is naked and not covered with scales, and their heart, like that of the frogs, has but one auricle, while the heart of the lizards and other true reptiles has two. While many species of salamanders, after becoming adult, never resort to the water except to deposit their eggs, all pass through the earlier stages of their existence and there undergo a series of remarkable changes of form. It was formerly a widely prevalent opinion that the salamanders were very poisonous; and in ancient natural history many astonishing instances are recorded of their poisonous qualities and of their powers to withstand the action of fire. They are, however, almost, if not quite, innocuous. The stories related of their appearance in the midst of blazing logs in fireplaces and their escape unharmed through the flames are not without foundation in fact. Several species live buried deep in decaying wood, and should a log containing them be placed on the hearth and lighted, they naturally endeavour to make their way to cooler quarters—the abundant viscid fluid which they secrete all over their body enabling them to resist fire to a considerable extent and in many instances to make good their escape.

Six species have been noticed in the vicinity of Ottawa. The Spotted Salamander (*Amblystoma punctatum*, Linn) is the largest species found in this vicinity where it is not uncommon. I have taken it on the McKay Estate, on the Canal Bank near Dow's Lake and in the Laurentides at Cantley. It usually attains a length of six inches, and I have one specimen which measures eight. Its colour above is a dark violet with numerous irregular bright yellow spots. Barton, who was the first in America to describe this species, called it the Poisonous Salamander (*S. venenosa*), but it is quite as harmless as other species.