

= Danube crested newt =

The Danube crested newt or Danube newt (*Triturus dobrogicus*) is a species of newt found in central and eastern Europe , along the basin of the Danube river and some of its tributaries and in the Dnieper delta . It has a smaller and more slender body than the other crested newts in genus *Triturus* but like these , males develop a conspicuous jagged seam on back and tail during breeding season .

For half of the year or longer , adults live in slow @-@ flowing river margins , lakes , or ponds , where reproduction takes place . Males perform a courtship display , and females lay around 200 eggs individually onto leaves of aquatic plants . Larvae develop two to four months in the water before reaching metamorphosis . For the remainder of the year , the newts live in shady land habitats , usually forests . Although not yet considered threatened , Danube crested newt populations have declined significantly , the reason being mainly habitat loss . The species is protected by law in the European Union .

= = Systematics and taxonomy = =

The Danube crested newt was described as a variety of the northern crested newt (*Triturus cristatus*) by C. Kiritzescu in 1903 . Later , it was considered a subspecies until genetic analysis supported its recognition as a separate species in the crested newt species complex . The northern crested newt is its likely sister species according to a molecular phylogenetic study based on mitochondrial DNA ; analysis of nuclear DNA gives however some conflicting results regarding this sister relationship .

Separated populations from the Danube Delta and the Pannonian Basin (see Distribution and habitats) were described as two subspecies , *T. dobrogicus dobrogicus* and *T. dobrogicus macrosoma* , in 2000 . Later genetic study , however , did not support the distinction of these two forms .

= = Description = =

Measuring 13 to 15 centimetres (5 @.@ 1 to 5 @.@ 9 in) long in total , the Danube crested newt is the smallest crested newt species . It has a more slender , elongate body than the other species , well adapted to swimming , with a narrow head and relatively short limbs . This body shape has evolved through an increase in the number of rib @-@ bearing vertebrae : there are 16 ? 17 of them in *T. dobrogicus* , the highest number among the crested newts .

The Danube crested newt 's back and sides are dark brown with black spots and white stippling . The belly is orange to red (in other crested newts , it is usually yellow or orange ? yellow) , with small or medium @-@ sized black blotches that have sharp edges . Like all crested newts , *T. dobrogicus* males develop a crest on their back and tail during breeding phase , which can be quite high and jagged and usually starts between the eyes and nostrils . Another feature of males at breeding season is a bluish @-@ white stripe along the tail .

= = Distribution and habitats = =

The Danube crested newt is found in three allopatric areas of distribution from central to eastern Europe :

Pannonian basin : From easternmost Austria through Czech Republic (small part in the southeast) , Slovakia , Hungary , northern Croatia , Bosnia @-@ Hercegovina (marginally) , northern Serbia to the east of Romania and southeast of Ukraine (Transcarpathian region) . This includes the middle floodplains of the Danube river and some of its tributaries , including the Drava , Sava and Tisza .

Lower Danube and Danube delta : Separated from the Pannonian basin by an area where the northern crested newt occurs , this central part ranges from southern Romania , northern Bulgaria , and small parts of southern Moldova to the Odessa region of southern Ukraine .

Dnieper delta : This small area of distribution in southern Ukraine was reported in 2005 . It is now isolated by steppe from the Danube basin , but it has been suggested that these areas were connected through marshlands during the last glacial maximum , when the level of the Black Sea was around 100 metres lower than today . This range may also extend to the lower basins of the Dniester and Bug rivers .

In addition to the northern crested newt to the north , the Danube crested newt 's range borders that of the Italian crested newt (*T. carnifex*) in the west , and that of the Macedonian (*T. macedonicus*) and Balkan (*T. ivanbureschi*) crested newts in the south .

Compared to the other crested newt species , the Danube crested newt is more adapted to life along a river system and frequently occurs in flowing water and together with fish . Typical breeding sites are slow @-@ flowing river margins , oxbow lakes , flooded marshland , larger ponds , or ditches , provided abundant underwater vegetation is available . During land phase , the newts live in deciduous forests or groves , bushlands , or meadows .

= = Behaviour and ecology = =

Danube crested newts have the longest aquatic phase in the genus *Triturus* . Adults move to their breeding sites in February or March and usually stay there for six months ; occasionally , they may even stay longer or return to the water in autumn . Males court females with a display of ritualised body movements . When they have gained the female 's interest , they guide it over a spermatophore they deposit on the ground , which the female then takes up with her cloaca . The eggs are fertilised internally . As in other crested newts , a female lays around 200 eggs per season , which are folded individually into leaves of aquatic plants . Larvae develop over two to four months until they reach metamorphosis and leave the water .

Both in water and on land , the newts are largely nocturnal . In their aquatic habitats , they hide under vegetation , and on land , they use structures such as logs , rocks , or small animal burrows for cover . They feed mainly on different invertebrates , but in the water may also prey on tadpoles and smaller newts . Predators include herons and other birds , snakes such as the grass snake , and various carnivorous mammals .

= = Threats and conservation = =

The population of the Danube crested newt has declined significantly , and the International Union for Conservation of Nature has assessed its conservation status as " near threatened " . The main threat is habitat destruction by humans , especially through drainage , damming , or pollution . Hybridisation with other crested newt species and a loss of breeding ponds because of decreasing spring rain in the southern range (possibly due to global warming) are also seen as threats . Like the other crested newts , *T. dobrogicus* is listed in the Bern Convention (appendix II) and the EU Habitats Directive (annexes II and IV) , and capture , disturbance , killing , trade , and destruction of habitats are prohibited .