# It‘s a small newt… but which one?

A guide to help differentiate between Palmate and Smooth Newts (‘small newts’)

**Hampshire & Isle of Wight Amphibian & Reptile Group**

Cloaca of a female smooth newt

Cloaca of a male smooth newt

This is a guide to help differentiate between Palmate and Smooth Newts ('small newts') in ponds, ideally by torchlight. Females of these two species can be tricky to tell apart and can sometimes need to be identified in the hand.

The focus is on recognising very specific key features that can be spotted fairly easily when you know what to look for. Other features can be useful in identifying species, but these are covered in detail in the ARG UK Amphibian ID guide which can be found on https://groups.arguk.org/hiwarg under 'Info & ID Guides'.

In addition to the species identification tips in the following pages, sexually mature males of all three species of newt have an enlarged black or darkened cloaca (body waste/sex organs), while females are pale and less swollen.

When using this guide, it is important to realise that general colouration is not a good indicator to differentiate species or sex of a newt as there can be a huge variety of shades, especially among the small newts. You may come across very dark newts, which may be small newt species, but if they are slightly warty and with yellow stripey toes, you probably have found a juvenile great crested newt, which is roughly the size of an adult small newt.

Juvenile great crested newt. Note stripey yellow toes

# Adult males

Male small newts have two key features that separate them fairly easily. Smooth newts have other key features. You can usually ID male small newts from the bank with a good torch. There are other features you can use, but the ones listed below are more than enough to ID males of these two newt species.

## Tails

Male Palmate Newts have a pale/honey coloured flash in the centre of their tail, flanked by a double row of dots in a V formation, sometimes merging into semi solid lines.

They have a pale lemon coloured flash along the base of the tail which is unbroken.

They also have a filament at the tip of their tail, but this is not usually visible in the water by torchlight

Smooth newts have a fairly even olive coloured tail for the most part with a slightly darker upper edge and orange and bluish-white stripes running parallel along the base of the tail, which are broken by dark bands.

*Smooth newts also have a crest running along their backs from the tip of the tail to their neck. This crest appears serrated along its upper edge, with dark tips to the serrations.*

## Feet

Male Palmate Newts have large heavily webbed back feet which are often very visible under water and from a little distance away. These may not be quite as obvious or dark earlier in the season, but as spring progresses they are the easiest key feature to ID males Palmates.

Male Smooth Newts have really long back toes with frilly, almost feathered edges. These differ from Palmates in that individual toes are easily distinguished and their length is fairly noticeable if not in heavy vegetation.

# Adult females

Female small newts can be difficult to identify from the edge of a pond. You need to have a really good view of the side of the tail, with decent light (from a torch or daylight) and a bit of luck to ID smooth or palmate females while in a pond. With practice, you'll pick up on their features quick and will improve. Otherwise you'll need to have the newt in hand to look at very specific features.

## Tails

Female palmates also have a double row of dots in a V formation like males, but not as bold or as obvious as males. They lack the honey coloured flash in the V, but it can be more of a tan/pinkish tone.

They can also have a line of broken dots in the centre of their V, but not always. Sometimes a pale flash above their back legs by the base of the tail is also present.

Female smooth newts usually have a fairly uniform coloured tail, sometimes with a single line of dots near the top of the tail, that follow on from a dorsal/lateral line on the body.

## Throat

The throat of palmate newts lacks pigment and appears to be a pale pink, almost translucent colour, which is more obvious in females.

The throat of a female smooth newt is white or pale cream, often with a speckling of spots. The spots can sometimes be absent or faint, but the throat will have a pale colour rather than the translucent pink of a palmate.

## Feet

There are two nodes on the back feet. In Palmates these are paler than the surrounding skin, but you may need to move the animal around in the light to get the best view.

The two nodes on the back feet of a smooth newt are the same colour as the surrounding skin and can be difficult to spot except in profile.

# Efts/Juveniles

Eft is a term normally used to describe a newly metamorphed (recently changed from a water living larva to an amphibious juvenile) newt. It can be very tricky telling the two small newt species apart at this stage, but if you are lucky, you should be able to see a pale dorsal stripe along their spine.

## Dorsal line

Juvenile palmate newts have a dorsal line from their neck to their tail, or at least until past the rear legs.

Juvenile smooth newts have a dorsal stripe from their neck to just behind their front legs.