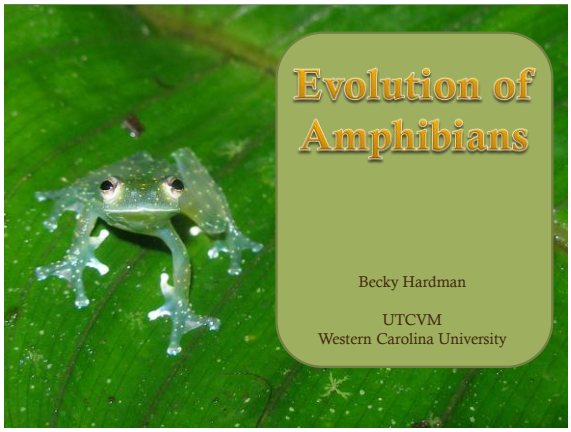
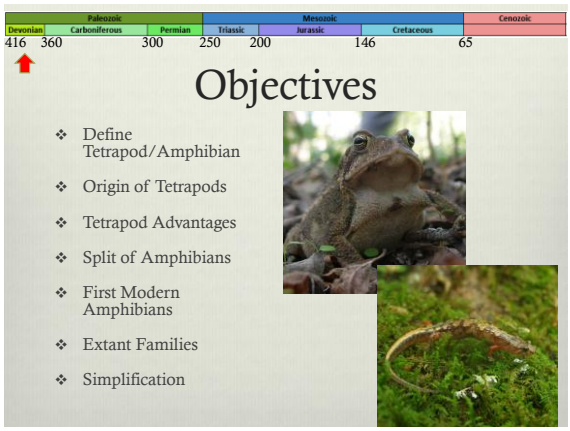
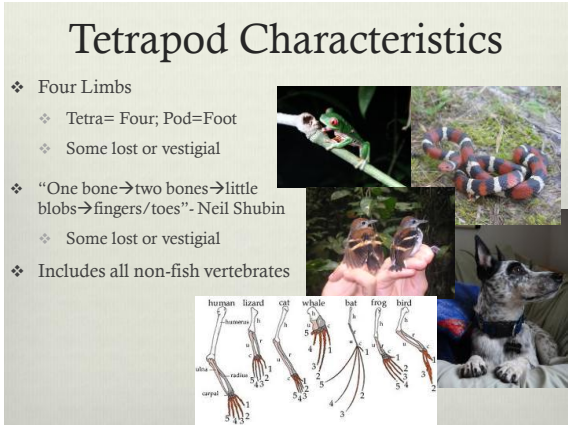

Evolution of Amphibians
Becky Hardman
UTCVM
Western Carolina University

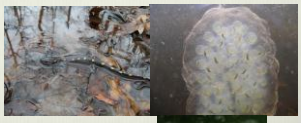

Paleozoic
Mesozoic
Cenozoic
Devonian
Carboniferous
Permian
Triassic
Jurassic
Cretaceous
416 360 300 250 200 146 65
Objectives
Define Tetrapod/Amphibian
Origin of Tetrapods
Tetrapod Advantages
Split of Amphibians
First Modern Amphibians
Extant Families
Simplification

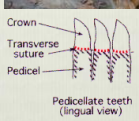

Tetrapod Characteristics
Four Limbs
Tetra= Four; Pod=Foot
Some lost or vestigial
"One bone→two bones→little blobs→fingers/toes"- Neil Shubin
Some lost or vestigial
Includes all non-fish vertebrates
human
lizard
cat
whale
bat
frog
bird

Amphibian Characteristics

"Tetrapod vertebrates that pass through a larval state and undergo metamorphosis into terrestrial adults."

- **Anamniotes**
  - Eggs need moist environment
- **Larval**; metamorphosis
- **Permeable Skin**
  - Cutaneous respiration
- **Two Gland Types**
  - Mucous
  - Poinson
- **Pedicellate Teeth**
- **Amphibian papillae/Opercular bone**
  - Can Hear virbations
- **Fat Bodies**
- **Green Rods-** fxn unknown
- **Singular Sacrum**
  - Lost in caecilians

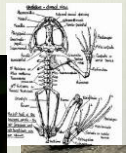




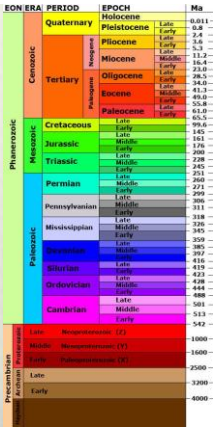
Amphibian Characteristics

As a Fossil…

- Articular surface of axis convex
- Exoccipital Bone articulates with dermal roofing
- Hand (Manus) 4 digits
- Foot (Pes) 5 digits
- Some Secondarily Lost

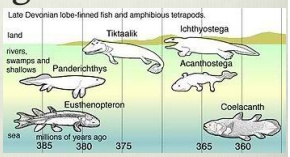


Geologic Time Scale



Devonian: Age of Fishes

- Lobed-Finned Fishes
  - Lungfishes; Coelocanths
  - Tetrapodomorpha
    - Panderichthyids
      - *Ichthyostega, Acanthostega*
        - **Tetrapods**



Tetrapod Adaptations

Or Exaptations?

Lungs
- Earliest Adaptation

Limbs*
- Movement and support
- Pectorals first

Free movement of head*
- Functional neck
- Feeding and catching prey

Tetrapod Advantages

- (1) Unexploited resources
- (2) Low Oxygen in warm shallow swamps
- (3) Periodic drought- move between pools

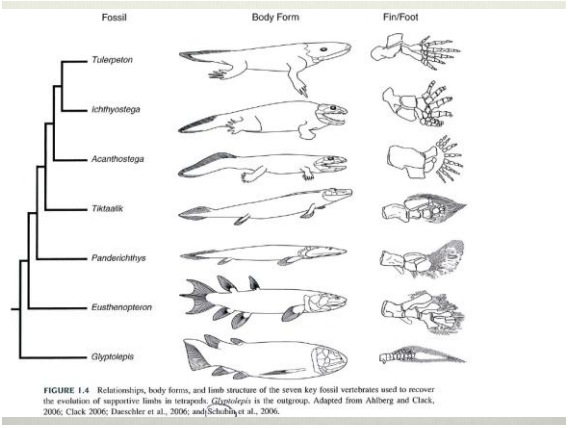
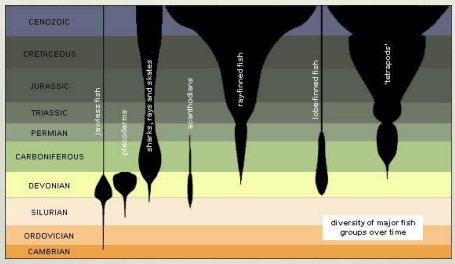
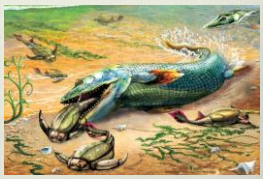


FIGURE 1.4 Relationships, body forms, and limb structure of the seven key fossil vertebrates used to recover the evolution of supportive limbs in tetrapods. *Glyptolepis* is the outgroup. Adapted from Ahlberg and Clack, 2006; Clack 2006; Daeschler et al., 2006; and Schubin et al., 2006.



Devonian: Fish to Tetrapod



- Panderichthyids 380 mya
  - Predators in shallow water
  - Eyes on top of head
  - Lung and Gills
  - Dorsoventrally Flattened*
  - Pectoral Fins more developed for support/crawling

Missing Link or "Fishpod": Tiktaalik 375 mya

FIGURE 1.4 Relationships, body forms, and limb structure of the seven key fossil vertebrates used to recover the evolution of supportive limbs in tetrapods. *Glyptolepis* is the outgroup. Adapted from Ahlberg and Clack, 2006; Clack 2006; Daeschler et al., 2006; and Schultze et al., 2006.

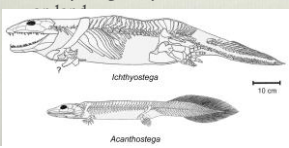
Paleozoic			Mesozoic			Cenozoic
Devonian	Carboniferous	Permian	Triassic	Jurassic	Cretaceous	

416 360 300 250 200 146 65

Devonian: Fish to Tetrapod

- Ichthyostega/Acanthostega 365 mya
  - First tetrapods
  - Still aquatic
  - Ichthyostega maybe seal-like

Icthyostega as pictured in *Scientific American*



Paleozoic			Mesozoic			Cenozoic
Devonian	Carboniferous	Permian	Triassic	Jurassic	Cretaceous	

416 360 300 250 200 146 65

Carboniferous-Permian: The Age of Amphibians

- **First Amphibians**
  - **Diverse**
  - **Many large fully terrestrial predators**
  - **Dermal Armor**
  - **Little Cutaneous Respiration**
  - **Aquatic Lifestyle and Reproduction**
  - **Scary!**
- **Early Split of Amphibians from All other Tetrapods**
  - **Reptilomorphs**
  - **Batrachomorphs**
    - **Temnospondyli – ancestors of modern amphibians**
    - **Lepospondyli**

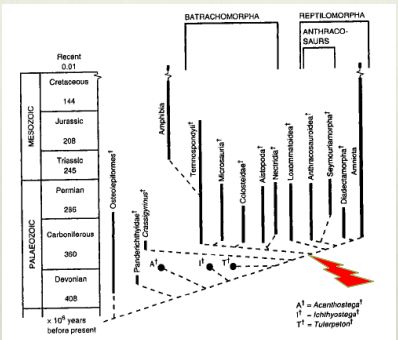


Fig. 1.5. Phylogenetic relationships of sarcopterygian fishes and tetrapods, showing the approximate dates of appearance of each clade in the fossil record. Many tetrapod clades were present by the mid-Carboniferous Period, but their relationships to one another are uncertain. The batrachomorph clade, which gave rise to modern amphibians, was clearly differentiated from the reptiliomorph clade, which gave rise to the amniotes (reptiles, birds, and mammals). After Pough, Heiser, and McFarland (1996).

Temnospondyli 330-120 mya

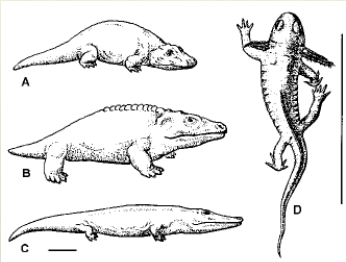


Fig. 1.6. Representative temnospondyls. (A) *Eryops*, a terrestrial dissorophid from the Permian. (B) *Cacops*, another terrestrial dissorophid from the Permian. (C) *Cyclotosaurus*, an aquatic crocodile-like capitosaur from the late Triassic. Scale lines indicate 10 cm. (D) *Branchiosaurus*, a paedomorphic or larval temnospondyl from the early Permian, with external gills similar to those of modern larval or paedomorphic salamanders. Scale line for (D) indicates 5 cm. After Pough, Heiser, and McFarland (1996).

Lepospondyli ~300 mya

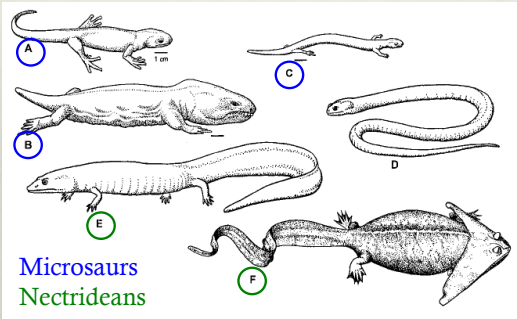
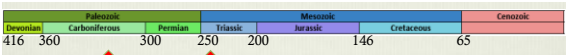


Fig. 1.8. Representative Carboniferous and Permian lepospondyls. A–C are microsaurs. (A) *Tuditanus*. (B) *Pantylus*. (C) *Goniorhynchus*. (D) *Ophiderpeton*, a snake-like aistopod. (E) *Sauropleura*, an aquatic nectridean. (F) *Diplocaulus*, a bizarre horned nectridean from early Permian deposits in Oklahoma and Texas. A–E after After Pough, Heiser, and McFarland (1996); F from Benton (1998).

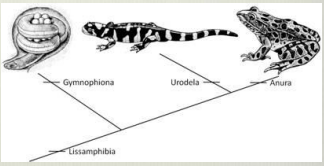
Triassic- Aquatic Shift 245mya

- Temnopsondyli: **Stereospondyli***
  - Only remaining Temnospondyls
  - All mostly aquatic
  - Terrestrial Reptiles dominated
  - Miniaturization through progenesis
  - Scales and Dermal Armor
  - Still much Diversity
  - One group marine



Lissamphibia: Modern Amphibians*

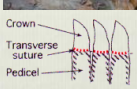
- Class: Amphibia
  - Monophyletic (most likely)
  - Caecilians
  - Frogs
  - Salamanders
- First Appearance
  - *Triadobatrachus* (Frog) 245mya
  - Triassic



Amphibian Characteristics

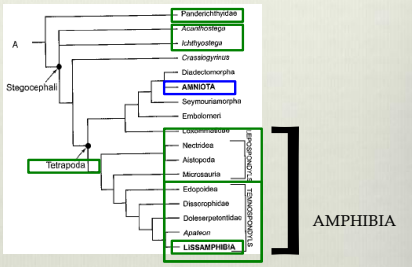
"Tetrapod vertebrates that pass through a larval state and undergo metamorphosis into terrestrial adults."

- **Anamniotes**
  - Eggs need moist environment
- **Larval**; metamorphosis
- **Permeable Skin**
  - Cutaneous respiration
- **Two Gland Types**
  - Mucous
  - Poinson
- **Pedicellate Teeth**
- **Amphibian papillae/Opercular bone**
  - Can hear low frequencies
- **Fat Bodies**
- **Green Rods-** fxn unknown
- **Singular Sacrum**
  - Lost in caecilians



Pedicellate teeth (lingual view)

Amphibia Evolution: Recap



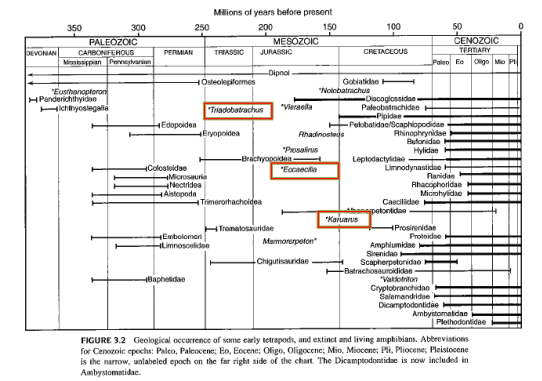
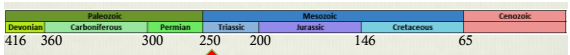
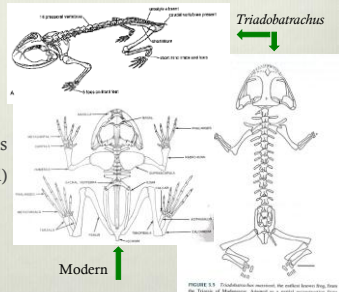


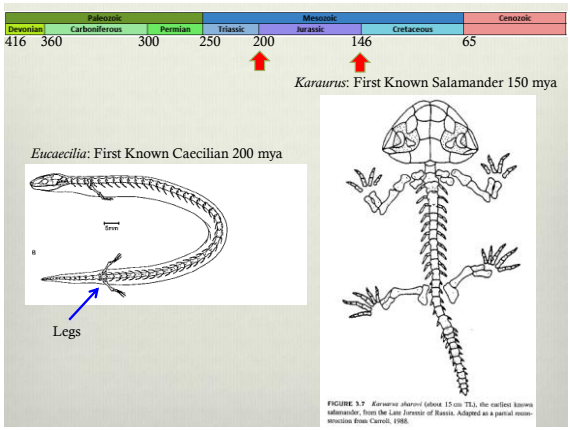
FIGURE 3.2 Geological occurrence of some early tetrapods, and extinct and living amphibians. Abbreviations for Cenozoic epochs: Paleo, Paleocene; Eo, Eocene; Oligo, Oligocene; Mio, Miocene; Pli, Pliocene; Pleistocene is the narrow, unlabeled epoch on the far right side of the chart. The Dicamptodontidae is now included in Ambystomatidae.

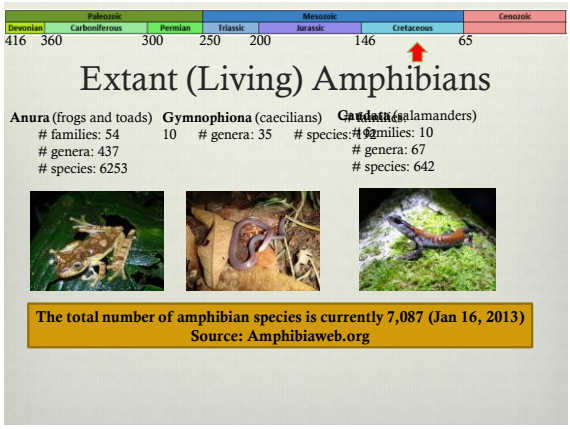


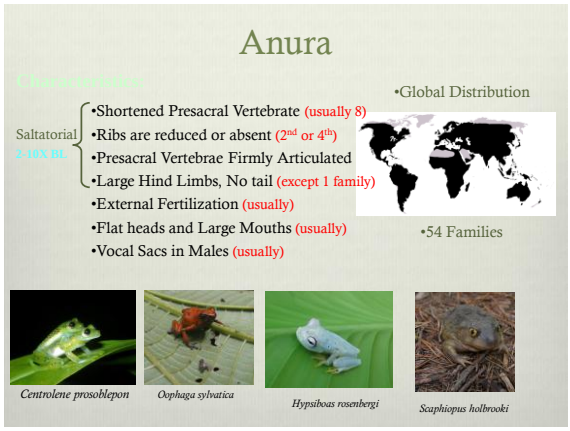
Triadobatrachus: First Lissamphibian, 245mya

- Frog Characteristics
  - Frog-like pelvic limb
  - U shaped pelvis
- Ancestral Characteristics
  - Caudal Vertebrae (Tail)
  - No Urostyle
  - 14 Presacral vertebrae




Paleozoic
Mesozoic
Cenozoic
Devonian
Carboniferous
Permian
Triassic
Jurassic
Cretaceous
416 360 300 250 200 146 65
Karaurus: First Known Salamander 150 mya
Eucaecilia: First Known Caecilian 200 mya
Legs


Paleozoic
Mesozoic
Cenozoic
Devonian
Carboniferous
Permian
Triassic
Jurassic
Cretaceous
416 360 300 250 200 146 65
Extant (Living) Amphibians
Anura (frogs and toads)
families: 54
genera: 437
species: 6253
Gymnophiona (caecilians)
10 # genera: 35 # species:
Caudata (salamanders)
families: 10
genera: 67
species: 642
The total number of amphibian species is currently 7,087 (Jan 16, 2013)
Source: Amphibiaweb.org


Anura
•Global Distribution
Saltatorial
2-10X BL
•Shortened Presacral Vertebrate (usually 8)
•Ribs are reduced or absent (2nd or 4th)
•Presacral Vertebrae Firmly Articulated
•Large Hind Limbs, No tail (except 1 family)
•External Fertilization (usually)
•Flat heads and Large Mouths (usually)
•Vocal Sacs in Males (usually)
•54 Families
Centrolene prosoblepon
Oophaga sylvatica
Hypsiboas rosenbergi
Scaphiopus holbrooki

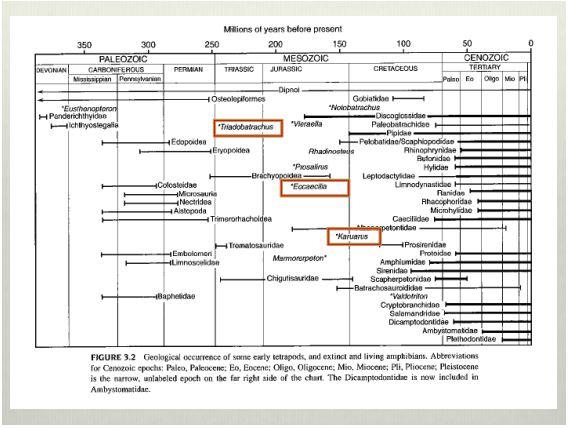
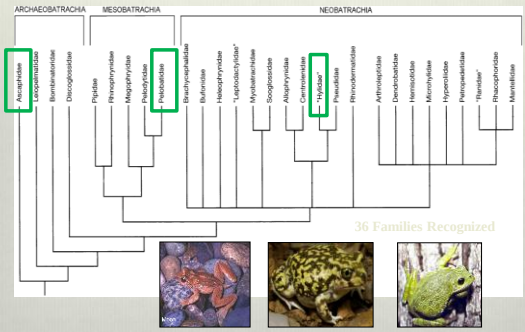
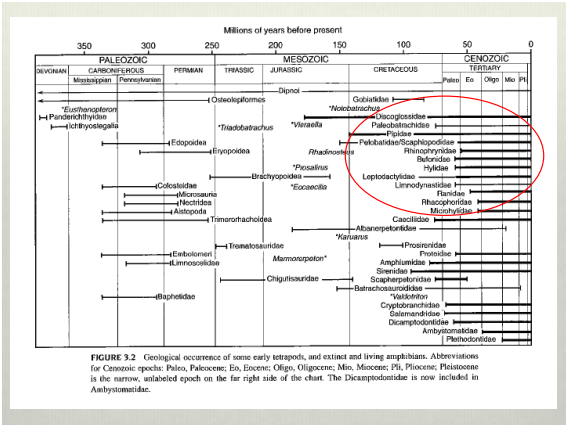


FIGURE 3.2 Geological occurrence of some early tetrapods, and extinct and living amphibians. Abbreviations for Cenozoic epochs: Paleo, Paleocene; Eo, Eocene; Oligo, Oligocene; Mio, Miocene; Pli, Pliocene; Pleistocene is the narrow, unlabeled epoch on the far right side of the chart. The Dicamptodontidae is now included in Ambystomatidae.

Anuran phylogeny

Primitive → Derived





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Gymnophiona

Caecus = blind

Characteristics:

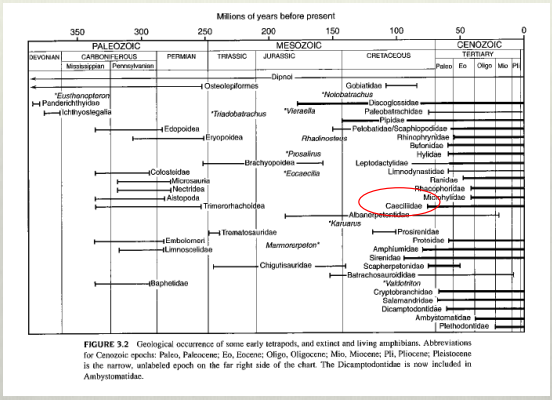
- Earthworm like (7 cm – 1.5 m)
- Limbless (pectoral & pelvic girdles absent)
- Degenerate Eyes (most are fossorial)
- Internal Fertilization (phallodeum)
- 20% Viviparous; 80% Oviparous

•Tropical Distribution

• 10 Families

Uraeotyphlus

Ichthyophis kohtaoensis



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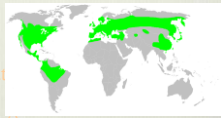
Caudata (Urodela)

•Smokies Diversity (31)

Characteristics:

- Tailed Amphibians
- Lizard like (30 mm – 1.5 m)
- Well-developed limbs (except aquat
- Internal Fertilization (most)
- Larval Development External (most)
- Lack Tympanum & Middle Ear (opercular)

•Mostly Temperate Distribution



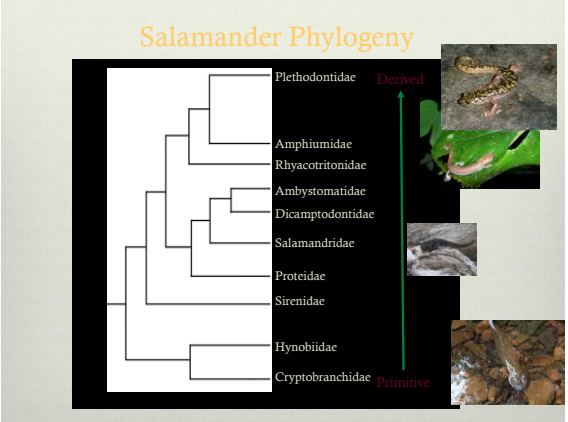
•10 Families

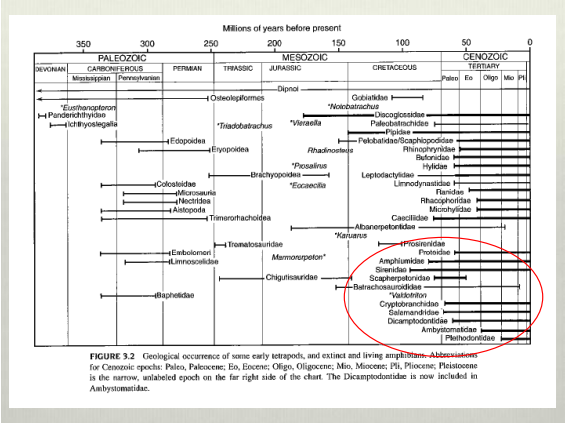
Plethodon shermani

Ambystoma talpoideum

Amphiuma tridactylum

Andrias japonicus





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