

ANIMAL OF THE MONTH

Axolotl

(*Ambystoma mexicanum*)

Habitat and Distribution:

Axolotl found in Shallow, cool, plant-rich freshwater canals and temporary wetlands. They spend daytime hours hiding in aquatic vegetation or muddy bottoms Found strictly in the wild within the high-altitude lake and canal network of Xochimilco in Mexico City, Mexico.

Description:

Axolotls are also known as Mexican walking fish. Their name stems from an Aztec word meaning water dog or water monster. Axolotls have cylindrical bodies, short legs, a relatively long tail and feathery external gills. They have four toes on the front feet, five toes on the back feet and moveable eyelids.

They are known for their blunt snouts and large mouths. Adult Axolotls can reach about 12 inches (30 cm) in length from nose to the tip of the tail and can weigh as much as 10.5 ounces (300 gr).

Interesting facts

- They exhibit *neoteny*, meaning they reach sexual maturity without transforming into land salamanders, keeping their baby gills for life.
- Axolotls can completely regenerate complex body parts, including legs, spinal tissue, hearts, and parts of the brain, without scarring
- Named after Xolotl, the Aztec god of fire and lightning, who was mythologically tied to transformation and water



Major Treats:

- Severe urban expansion from Mexico City causes heavy water pollution and loss of natural water ways.
- Invasive Species: Non-native carp and tilapia introduced to the canals compete for food and actively eat axolotl eggs and young.

Conservative Strategies

- Clean up polluted canal waters and stop urban waste from entering Xochimilco.
- Remove invasive fish like carp and tilapia that eat axolotl eggs.
- Build safe refuges with native plants to help wild populations grow.

Conservation Status :

IUCN Status: Critically Endangered.

Stephenson Natural History Museum invites you to visit and have a look at preserved animal diversity . You will surely enjoy this visit!