

A Type of Salamander Up for Adoption

VOCABULARY WORDS

1. Amphibian (Noun) /æm'fɪbiən/ an animal of a class that typically lives in water when young and develops lungs as an adult, including frogs, toads, and salamanders
Example: The decline in amphibian populations around the world is a major concern for conservationists.
2. Icon (Noun) /'aɪkɔ:n/ a person or thing that is admired or serves as a symbol for something
Example: Hershey's chocolate, Statue of Liberty, and Barbie are some of the icons identified with the United States.
3. Extinct (Adjective) /ɪk'stɪŋkt/ (of an animal or plant species) that has died out completely
Example: People must protect the environment to prevent the animals from becoming extinct.
4. Artificial (Adjective) /,ɑrtə'fɪʃəl/ made by people, rather than being natural
Example: There is an artificial beach in the middle of the city and both locals and foreigners are all enjoying it.
5. Credit (Verb) /'kredɪt/ to believe or say that a particular person or thing is responsible for something
Example: She was given credit by the owner for the success of the business.
6. Captivity (Noun) /kæp'tɪvɪti/ the state of being kept as a prisoner or in a place one cannot leave
Example: It is estimated that there are around 5,000 tigers living in captivity in the US.



Would you buy an axolotl dinner? The amphibian, known for its smiling expression, has become a popular internet icon in recent years. However, it may be going extinct. The axolotl is a type of salamander that lives underwater for most of its life. But when they get older, axolotls will occasionally adapt to living on land. Typically about 20 centimeters long as adults, all the world's wild axolotls live in and around Lake Xochimilco — pronounced "so-chee-meel-koh" — on the south side of Mexico City.

With research showing that numbers of wild axolotls are decreasing, the National Autonomous University of Mexico has started a campaign called "AdoptAxolotl." Supporters can choose how much they want to donate to help the animals. The cheapest option is "invite an axolotl to dinner": for about \$10, supporters can help to preserve the axolotls' habitat, and receive a small poster with information about what they eat. With larger donations starting at about \$30, supporters can "adopt" an axolotl or one of their habitats for anywhere from one month to a year, receiving a thank you letter and an adoption certificate.

In 1998, 6,000 axolotls were recorded per square kilometer of Lake Xochimilco. But pollution and new predators that were added to the water in the 1970s have caused that population to drop, and research from 2014 found there were only about 35 axolotls per square kilometer. The lake has an area of about 25 square kilometers.

Much of the lake is covered in artificial floating islands called chinampas, made from branches and soil from the bottom of the lake. With small canals between these islands, chinampas have been used for agriculture in Mexico since the time of the Aztecs.

Although challenged in the wild, axolotls are doing well as pets all over the world. Some breeders credit the popular video game Minecraft for the increase in the animals' popularity, as the game has allowed players to catch and keep axolotls as pets since 2021. However, there are now more real axolotls in captivity than in the wild.

DISCUSSION

1. What are your thoughts on the AdoptAxolotl campaign?
2. Would you be interested in "adopting" an axolotl?
3. Is your country home to any salamander species?
4. Are any of your country's native species in danger of going extinct?
5. Have you been to Mexico? If so, did you get a chance to see much wildlife? If not, would you like to?