

*Axolotl*  
*Ambystoma mexicanum*  
Natural History



**Description:** Axolotls are a paedomorphic aquatic salamander. Paedomorphic means they retain juvenile characteristics through adulthood. One of these traits are the feathered, external gills and finned tails. Axolotls range from 60-110 grams and grow up to 9 inches long. Wild populations are a dark, mottled brown but captive specimens can range between five different morphologies including wild (brown to green), leucistic (white body with pink gills), albino (white with red gills), golden (golden body and gills with golden flecks) and melanoid (black).

**Vocalizations:** Axolotls do not make any distinct sounds as they communicate through visual and chemical cues.

**Habitat:** Found in still, high-altitude, freshwater lakes. Axolotls depend on pristine water quality.

**Distribution:** Axolotls are native solely to two lake chains, Chalco and Xochimilco, near Mexico City, Mexico. Wild populations have been extirpated from the Chalco lake chain and remain only in the Xochimilco lakes. Axolotls are common in the pet trade as well as research facilities.

**Diet:** Axolotls are the top predator in their natural habitat. They are carnivorous and will feed on a range of prey including, insects, worms, mollusks, fish and arthropods.

**Lifespan:** In the wild, axolotls generally live 5-6 years but can reach 15 years in captivity.



**Breeding:** Axolotls reach reproductive maturity after their first year of life. In the wild, axolotls breed once a year between March and June. Young hatch after 10-14 days. Axolotls lay between 100 and 300 eggs. Hatchlings are independent immediately after hatching.

**Conservation Status:** Axolotls are listed as critically endangered. Wild populations are nearly extinct due to the introduction of predatory fish and habitat loss. Already extirpated from lake Chalco, only a few scattered populations remain in Lake Xochimilco. Nearly all captive populations can be traced back to 33 specimens that were shipped from Xochimilco to Paris in 1864. Axolotls have gained popularity as the campaign to save their wild populations has gained traction world-wide.