

X-ANIMAL SIGHTINGS AT THE DEEP!

Whilst the public wait in anticipation for the release of the latest X-Men film, The Deep has revealed that real life X-animals are residing in one of its tanks and what's more they are breeding fast!

Just like the indestructible X-Man Wolverine, the alien-like axolotls have unique powers to regenerate. If one loses a leg in an attack by another animal it can regenerate a new limb in just a few weeks!

Deep curator Katy Duke explains: "Not only do axolotls look like nothing else on earth, but their special X-man-like ability to regenerate sets them apart from most other animals! These strange creatures are amphibians and have an unusual life cycle where they can retain their juvenile features even as adults. This species, *Ambystoma mexicanum* has a long body which elongates into a tail and can be either a mottled, dark brown or white. Its jointed limbs have small 'feet', complete with four tiny digits on the front and five on the back limbs. Even though they have rudimentary lungs, they breathe mainly through prominent feather-like gills.

"The 29 adults are approximately 25cm in length. From a clutch of eggs we have 22 babies that are thriving in our quarantine. When they are a little bigger, they will join their parents in our Rio Grande tank in the Living Rivers Display."

The Deep's own superhero X-Animals can be viewed in their tank which is part of the Living Rivers.

Background

Axolotls have an amazing ability to regenerate limbs and other body parts. *Ambystoma mexicanum* originates from Lake Texcoco underlying Mexico City. As of 2010, wild axolotls are near extinction due to urbanisation in Mexico City, mainly from pollution but also from the introduction of non-native fish that feed on axolotl eggs and fry. The Deep is displaying the axolotls in its Living Rivers exhibit, which shows the threats faced in these delicate ecosystems. The axolotl currently is on the International Union for Conservation of Nature's annual Red List of endangered species, its status is 'Critically Endangered'. They grow up to 30cms in length and eat worms, insects and small fish.

The Deep's axolotls are captive bred and the aquarist team hopes to learn more about their biology so we can contribute to understanding how they can be best conserved.

Further information

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