

February 2022

The Columbus Zoo
and Aquarium
Volunteer Newsletter

ZooNews



HAPPY VALENTINE'S DAY





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The mission of ZooNews is to promote awareness, education, preservation and conservation of our natural world.

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FROM THE PRESIDENT



Greetings Volunteer Group,

First off, I wanted to thank you for the warm welcome; I have so enjoyed visiting with many of you around the Zoo and getting to know you.

As we enter the new year, I like to reflect on what we were able to accomplish in 2021. As you all know the Columbus Zoo Family of Parks had a remarkably successful 2021. From near record setting attendance at 2,700,000 to impactful wildlife conservation successes, we delivered on our mission every day-to lead and inspire by connecting people and wildlife.

We became more accessible, with the launch of Culture Pass Program, whereby Columbus Metropolitan Library cardholder families can borrow a one-time zoo pass to visit us on any day. We welcome all to visit our family of parks, and we will continue to seek out creative ways to eliminate barriers for underserved communities to visit.

We have an exciting year ahead of us. We are currently engaged in planning for a major redevelopment to our North America region, a new strategic plan that will guide our growth, as well as a new Master Plan. In just five years we will celebrate our centennial. What we do over the next five years will set the direction for the Columbus Zoo Family of Parks for our next 100 years.

Finally, I wanted to share a comment that was posted on one of our social media platforms recently, from a Zoo visitor. They were happy with the offseason discount, and thoroughly enjoyed their visit, even though some areas were closed; "The best part—the docents. We learned so much from them, it was like a private tour."

If you all ever wondered if you make a difference, I hope this comment is a great reminder about how much you positively impact our guests' experiences.

Thank you for your dedication and commitment, it makes all the difference.

Tom Schmid, President/CEO

Information about Columbus Zoo and Aquarium Short Term Membership Pass <https://cml.bibliocommons.com/v2/record/S105C3465235>

Communiqué

Spring is so close! Training dates are in place and you should have received an email regarding the days and times. All trainings will be via Zoom and then additional in-person training will happen for Touch Pool, Reptile Encounter, Stingray Bay and Lorikeet Garden. Training time will count towards your accumulated hours total and any hours awards. As a reminder, all Zoo team members need to participate in annual Safety, Security and Zoo Policy training. Those will be offered on Sunday February 13 at 1pm, Thursday February 17 at 7pm and Sunday February 27 at 1pm. You only need to attend one session.

The continuing education calendar is almost finalized. Our first Tuesday Night Zoom is Tuesday, March 1, 2022 at 7pm. Check the Volunteer Portal for topics as they will be updated as soon as our presenters

verify their participation. The link for the Tuesday Night Zooms will be on the Portal by February 28, 2022 and the same link will be used for all the Tuesday Night Zoom meetings.

Spring and summer are the Zoo's busiest times and when we need you interacting with guests the most. Adult Volunteers and Docents need to have at least 25 hours of on-grounds volunteer service by Labor Day, Monday September 5, 2022.

A new year means a new start and we are excited to see what 2022 will bring. Thank you for helping us make this the best year ever.

The Volunteer Services Team – Ginger, Carole, Mary, Kathy and Rachel



Remembering Betty White

Photo of Betty White and Jack Hanna courtesy of Graham S. Jones, Columbus Zoo and Aquarium

Hope and Concern for Florida's West Indian Manatees



*Photo courtesy of Graham S. Jones,
Columbus Zoo and Aquarium*

The addition of four more young manatees to the Columbus Zoo and Aquarium's Manatee Coast in January is a direct result of conditions that created last year's devastating loss of about one-sixth of the West Indian manatee population in the southeastern United States and Puerto Rico.

The Zoo's four new manatees are all 2-year old females, three of which were rescued from Florida's east coast. They bring Manatee Coast's aggregation – a group of manatees – to nine, the most ever for the facility that opened in 1999. These four increase the number of manatees rehabilitated at the Zoo to 39.

The animals' arrival from Florida acute care facilities comes at the same time that wildlife officials and conservationists are working to prevent a repeat of last year's setback for the species.

Preliminary statistics from the Florida Fish and Wildlife Commission (FWC) revealed that a record 1,101 manatees died of various causes in 2021, far outpacing both 2020's 637 deaths and the previous high of 824 in 2018. Carly Jones, a commission official, acknowledged the final mortality count could be higher.

Much of 2021's casualty total was due to starvation, the result of expanding blue-green algae blooms that caused a massive loss of seagrass, particularly in the Indian River Lagoon on the Atlantic Coast. Seagrass is the primary food for West Indian manatees seeking Florida's temperate winter weather.

Manatees pursue warm water – particularly the state's natural springs or power plant effluents – because they can't survive prolonged exposure to temperatures below 68 degrees. Despite their size, these sea cows have relatively little body fat.

More Deaths and More Rescues

About 700 manatees died last year along Florida's east coast alone, including 359 in Brevard County. The loss—resulting from what is officially called an Unusual Mortality Event--was particularly high from November 2020 to April 2021, and wildlife officials and conservationists are concerned a comparable situation may occur this year.

There is no current count of manatees that reside or winter in Florida. The state's last complete manatee census in 2016, found 8,810 animals. Limited surveys afterwards indicated an 18 percent decline in Florida's manatees from 2017 to a total of 5,733 manatees in 2019.

A comprehensive state manatee census is now under way.

As manatee deaths rose, so did the number of rescues. About 150 of the animals were saved last year and more continue, causing additional pressure on members of the Manatee Rescue and Rehabilitation Partnership (MRP), including the Columbus Zoo.

Continued on page 5

The MRP has five acute care facilities in Florida to treat sick, injured or orphaned manatees and a quartet of secondary holding facilities, counting the Zoo, where the manatees can rehabilitate and grow before release into the wild. When acute-care facilities need space to take in more manatees that need critical help, they send stabilized animals to the second-stage rehabilitation facilities.

"We are working very hard to help the efforts in Florida," said Becky Ellsworth, curator for the Zoo's Shores region. "The Zoo is and always will be ready and able to help our colleagues" in the MRP.

Manatee Coast does not have a maximum number of manatees it can hold, she explained. Instead, it is limited by water-quality parameters. With more manatees comes more lettuce and, resultingly, more feces, all for the facility's water filtration system to process.

A Short-term Feeding Solution

In response to the current crisis, the FWC and FWS approved an experimental, limited plan for wildlife officials to supplement the diet of malnourished manatees this winter in Florida. The additional food includes romaine lettuce, which the Zoo uses at Manatee Coast.

This plan is not without its challenges. While it remains a violation of federal and state law for the public to give food to the animals, there is some concern that supplemental feedings by experts could cause manatees to associate people with food and approach them, which potentially puts them in more danger of collisions with boats.

Providing a supplemental diet also can be expensive. The most recent annual cost estimate to feed an adult

manatee at the Columbus Zoo is \$34,635, says Dana Hatcher, director of Animal Nutrition. The price tag "fluctuates tremendously," based on the market price of romaine.

The expense of providing a diet for younger manatees is similar, she noted, because these fast-growing animals "ingest a much higher percentage of their body weight compared to an adult." That means the cost of feeding nine manatees at the zoo for a year, if necessary, could cost more than \$300,000.

Major Threats to Manatees

In 2021, pollution has increasingly become a topic of concern for manatees. This has particularly been the case in the Indian River Lagoon, a highly diverse, shallow-water estuary stretching along about 150 miles – about 40 percent – of Florida's east coast.



*A recent photo of manatees gathering in warmer water at DeSoto Canal in Melbourne, Florida.
Photo courtesy of Cindy Payne*

Research conducted by environmental scientists have indicated that over a 10-year period, there has been a decline of approximately 46,000 acres of seagrass. However, an estimated 58 percent decline of that plant biomass has died off because huge algae blooms formed and blocked the sunlight needed for the marine grass to survive.

While algae can be beneficial -- the tiny plants are food for aquatic animals -- that's not the case when they multiply to critical levels, as they have in areas where the plankton species feed off nutrient-rich wastewater runoff from sources such as agricultural and lawn fertilizers and aging septic tanks.

Nutrient-rich runoffs also are behind two other troublesome Florida algae blooms, red tide and brown tide. These are harmful to manatees and other species for another reason: They are toxic.

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Manatee Ashley

Photo courtesy of Graham S. Jones, Columbus Zoo and Aquarium

Meanwhile, watercraft strikes, which have been a major cause of fatal manatee injuries in the past, were blamed for fewer than 10 percent of the deaths last year.

Evaluation of Conservation Status

Currently, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) lists the Florida manatee as threatened. The difference in designation between endangered and threatened determines the amount of flexibility the federal government has when it comes to managing numerous factors, including economic activity. An endangered status often means a species is at the brink of extinction.

In July 2021, the FWS initiated a comprehensive Endangered Species Act status review for the West Indian manatee, including both the Florida and Antillean subspecies, explained Jennifer M. Koches, spokesperson for the agency in the South Atlantic-Gulf region. The review should be completed this fall.

Koches said the “broad range” of West Indian manatee appears “relatively stable,” but the FWS is looking at the impact of the mortality along Florida’s Atlantic Coast. The service will use a science-based review “to confirm the current listing status of the manatee ... or recommend a change in status.”

While many of the issues that manatees face have remained as ongoing challenges for the species, government agencies, research facilities, and conservation organizations like the Columbus Zoo and other MRP partners continue to work together to each play an important role in helping to protect manatees.

Sources:

Becky Ellsworth, curator, Shores Region, Columbus Zoo and Aquarium

Dana Hatcher, director of Animal Nutrition, Columbus Zoo and Aquarium

Jennifer M. Koches, public affairs specialist, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, South Atlantic-Gulf region

Carly Jones, Florida Fish & Wildlife Commission’s Fish and Wildlife Research Institute

Florida Fish & Wildlife Commission Manatee Mortality Statistics

<https://myfwc.com/research/manatee/rescue-mortality-response/statistics/mortality/>

Florida Fish & Wildlife Commission Manatee Abundance Statistics

<https://myfwc.com/research/manatee/research/population-monitoring/synoptic-surveys/>

<https://myfwc.com/research/manatee/research/population-monitoring/abundance/>

Florida Fish & Wildlife Commission Manatee Rescue & Rehabilitation Partnership

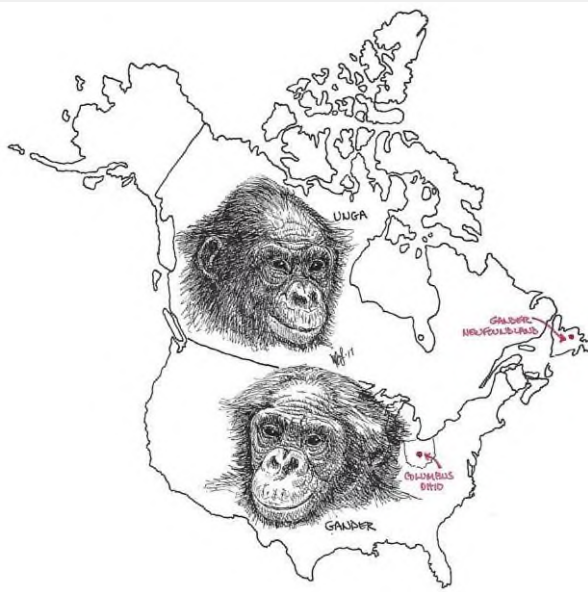
[Manatee Rescue & Rehabilitation Partnership | FWC \(myfwc.com\)](#)

The following article appeared in the May 2017 issue of ZooNews. The play *Come From Away* will be appear in Columbus from February 8-13, 2022.

Unfortunately, Unga passed away in March 2021, but her son Gander and his brother Jerry still live at the Zoo. Her daughter Elema, born in 2012, now lives at the Milwaukee County Zoo.

Come from Away: Our Broadway Connection

On March 12 (2017), the musical *Come from Away* opened on Broadway. The play tells the remarkable story of how the small town of Gander, Newfoundland opened its doors and heart to the world immediately following 9/11. In the hours immediately following the attack, all planes were directed to land, and 38 planes carrying 6597 passengers – and some very precious cargo - were diverted to the town of Gander.



Now seems like a good time to retell the story of bonobo Unga, who was en route to Columbus when her plane was diverted to Gander. Unga, who was 8 at the time, was travelling from Planckendahl Zoo in Belgium along with another bonobo named Kosana. They were accompanied by their Belgian keeper Harry and Beth Pohl who was head keeper in African Forest for our Zoo at the time. (Since bonobos are part of an international SSP, international breeding recommendations are not unusual for them.) Although Kosana was going to another zoo in the USA, both bonobos were coming to Columbus because it was, and is, a licensed CDC quarantine facility, and often quarantines animals for other zoos.

After being held on the tarmac for 13 hours, everyone was allowed to deplane. The passengers and crew were welcomed by the people of Gander. Books, and now the play, have been written about the

extraordinary hospitality of the town that expanded to receive thousands of anxious, weary travelers. The bonobos were moved to a cargo building, where they were to remain for five days. Although no one but keeper Harry had contact with the bonobos, the people of the town made sure the bonobos had plenty of fresh fruit and produce, and they bent the rules to allow Harry to be the one to care for them.

Here at home, curator Audra Meinelt, who was a keeper at the time, and the rest of the staff were anxiously awaiting word from Beth. Audra learned first-hand about the amazing reception everyone was receiving in Gander. As soon as the planes were cleared to travel, Dusty Lombardi, head of Living Collections at the time, and Dan Hunt, assistant head, went to Chicago to drive the bonobos to Columbus so that the keepers could fly directly home.



Photo of Gander courtesy of Audra Meinelt



Audra was here to meet the bonobos, and she remembered with a smile how utterly unstressed and comfortable both bonobos were as they “sauntered from the crates” and made themselves right at home. What a testimony to the care they had received! Audra commented that the bonobo crates were so ideal that they are the ones we use to transport bonobos today.

Beth knew without a doubt what to name Unga’s first born, and a little over two years later, on December 29, 2003, Gander was born. Through Unga and Gander, we can share this wonderful story with our visitors.

Not only will our Zoo always remember the town, the town has never forgotten the bonobos that they welcomed but never met. Audra does radio interviews every few years when the town recognizes the event. They feel that the bonobos are an important part of their story, and yes, the bonobos are part of the play!

— Kathy Goldsmith

Thanks to Congo curator Audra Meinelt for sharing her memories for this article.

Further reading: *The Day the World Came to Town: 9/11 in Gander, Newfoundland* by Jim DeFede

Unga sign recently added to the Bonobo area.

Photo courtesy of Harvey Castner

Hoo-Knew is a new feature in ZooNews that provides Adult Volunteers and Docents with quick, easy animal facts that can be shared with guests. Thank you to Adult Volunteer Deb Poling for contributing the Hoo-Knew facts.



HOO-KNEW?

Kangaroo Walkabout

Did you know that Western Red Kangaroos have square snouts and Eastern Grey Kangaroos have rounded snouts like a deer?

Jerry Borin and “Opportunities”



Jerry Borin became CEO of the Columbus Zoo and Aquarium in 1993. Before that, he was the Zoo's General Manager for eight years. The beginning of an amazing 23 years full of opportunities.

With the passage of a five-year levy in 1985, the Zoo began looking for a General Manager to handle the influx of funds.

“Before coming to the Zoo, I worked with the City of Columbus doing budgets and managing large amounts of money,” said Jerry. “Somehow my name got in the process and they offered me the job of General Manager. It took me like five seconds to say yes.”

Jerry installed business practices unknown before this: time cards punched, requisitions filled in, loose change counted. He credits Mel Dodge, Director of the Columbus Recreation and Parks Department, with teaching him about working with public funds and setting him on his path.

Only a few of the old buildings are still here from the time when Jerry started. “We were reorganizing how we exhibited animals, and over time we took a section of the Zoo, rebuilt it and did it again and again until we had rebuilt most of the Zoo,” Jerry said.

In 1992, before Jerry became CEO, the Zoo housed giant pandas from China. Jerry says, “Part of the agreement was any excess money generated from the pandas had to be restricted to conservation purposes. At the end of the year, we had close to a million dollars in excess revenue and with that we started the first ever conservation fund at the Zoo.”

1993 marks the year Jerry officially became Director of the Columbus Zoo. “I approached it from the standpoint it had to be more business-like as we were growing,” he explains. “We needed to get simple things done so we

could spend time working on the tough problems. It was mostly putting systems in place. We needed more donors, more concessions and more efficiency. I came into the Zoo from a management business background so that was my strength. I wasn't hired for animal knowledge. I was hired for organizational skills. The fun part of my job was I got to interact with the animal keepers and it was wonderful to learn from them.”

Patty Peters, former Media Director, says: “One of the best things about working for Jerry was his willingness to provide staff with the support and resources they needed to accomplish their goals and then get out of their way. Jerry enjoyed getting to know everyone and learning more about their work, ideas and dreams. Of course, who isn't fascinated with the work done by the animal care team? But Jerry was genuinely interested in all areas.”

In 1994, Zoo friends, staff, keepers and volunteers flooded Franklin County with signs, pamphlets and good words about the Zoo, promoting a 10-year levy. “That was a big deal,” Jerry said, “because we had ten years worth of money to plan for the future.” For the next decade, Jerry oversaw the opening of a new major exhibit almost annually.

More than 10 years later, Jerry saw another opportunity. “The water park next door was interested in us buying out their lease to take over that property. We wanted to relocate a major highway around the Zoo but needed that property to make it happen. I told the board new exhibits would cost a lot to operate so we needed new ways to generate income. We did projections and the decision was made to construct a brand new water park we would operate.”

“Back In the late 1980s, the golf course became available and we jumped on the opportunity to get that 265 acres,” he elaborated. “So much development was coming our way, we knew if we didn't get land now, others would develop it. For a while, we thought that would be our future African area. The decision

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Photo of Jerry Borin reprinted with
Permission from Zoophoria

eventually was made to continue to use it as a golf course after we acquired additional real estate."

"Some of this was timing, some of it was luck. These things for the Columbus Zoo all came together in pieces. We became more than a zoo but rather a business holding company. It's a little unique among zoos to have that many different things."

Continuing with good timing and some luck, Jerry oversaw the acquisition of 165 acres of farmland that would later be home to the award-winning Polar Frontier and Heart of Africa expansions.

The Wilds began in the late 1970s as part of a consortium. It became fully run by our Zoo fairly late in Jerry's tenure. 1,500 acres of the total 10,000 are being currently used. "The Wilds has potential way into our future," says Jerry.

"You can work hard and get opportunities you never anticipated, and sometimes you just get lucky."

— Sue Allen



Zoo Book Club

Beth Armstrong, a retired gorilla keeper at the Columbus Zoo and Aquarium and the author of *Voices from the Ape House*, spoke to 45 members of the Zoo Book Club on Saturday, Jan. 29. She credits the success of the Zoo's gorilla program with their philosophy that dates to the 80s: "Stand back...give them what they need. Create something that works for gorillas, and spread the word to other zoos."

— Bev Larson



Getting Active with the Lions



Did you resolve to become more active this year? Are you counting your steps or do you have a Fit Bit on your wrist? You're not alone if you're trying to ward off normal age-related mobility changes with increased activity. Our lion pride is doing the same thing.

BACKGROUND

At her November birthday party elderly lioness Asali easily leapt onto the wing of the airplane to retrieve a treat bypassing the set of stairs that were installed last year to help her reach this favorite resting spot. Her agility was impressive. At 16 Asali is the oldest large cat at the Zoo, she's nearing Median Life Expectancy (MLE) and has age-related arthritis in her wrists and hocks. These factors obviously aren't keeping her from going where she wants however, the primary reason she's still active and engaged is a senior cat program that consists of daily exercise and yoga!

This three-part program, which was started in 2017 when Tomo started to decline, goes beyond the myriad of invasive treatments such as blood draws, ultrasounds and laser treatments that are done in the training chute. The goal is a proactive, non-invasive, holistic way to keep the lions agile, motivated and healthy.

Are these new routines working? Has Asali kicked "Father Time" to the curb?

Let's take a look at the components.

THE COMPONENTS

Cardio

The cats run four laps across the entire length of their habitat and must "station" on each side before receiving their reward. Guests sometimes have the opportunity to witness this in the morning and it's a great way for docents to introduce topics such as training and animal care to the conversation. The sessions are held three to four times a week.

Yoga

The lions practice three different poses in each session. These include a bow, sternal side and neck stretches. Each pose is done several times in a workout session. Yoga was the hardest program for the lions to learn. More poses may be added ... an example of how the management of a group of animals is a fluid concept.

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Kasi on pegs

*Photo and label from FELID TAG TIMES
You Can Teach an Old Cat New Tricks*

Stretches

There are two types. The first finds the lions reaching to touch pieces of PVC pipe in the mesh of their indoor habitat. Half of the pipe is on the lion's side of the mesh, half on the keeper's side. The lions have to differentiate between left and right and touch the PVC with the required paw at the required height. These exercises work their legs, shoulders and core depending on the location of the pipe in the mesh.

Range of motion stretching is done in the training chute. Lions lift their back legs on command, keepers rotate the limb in three different directions. This activity is very similar to what you might see a vet do with your dog or cat in a small animal practice, but on a much larger scale.

Are these new routines working? Has Asali kicked "Father Time" to the curb? She willingly participates - participation is voluntary for all the lions - and the limping associated with her arthritis has decreased substantially ... maybe she has fewer aches and pains. All of the lions are routinely scored against a cat mobility scale. Asali and 15-year-old half-sister Kazi are scored weekly for mobility, bi-monthly for condition. The younger cats are scored less often. Animal Care staff report that all of the cats have more energy, more range of motion and look great.

— Nancy Mulholand

For further reading:

What's the Score, Assessing the Body Condition of Lions and Tigers. Zoo News March 2012, p.7 or Exercise-Elephant Style Zoo News March 2018 p 5

Sources:

You CAN Teach an Old Cat New Tricks, Heather Sinn, Felid TAG Times p 17-18, Autumn., 2021; Heather Sinn, keeper Heart of Africa, Columbus Zoo and Aquarium



HOO-KNEW?

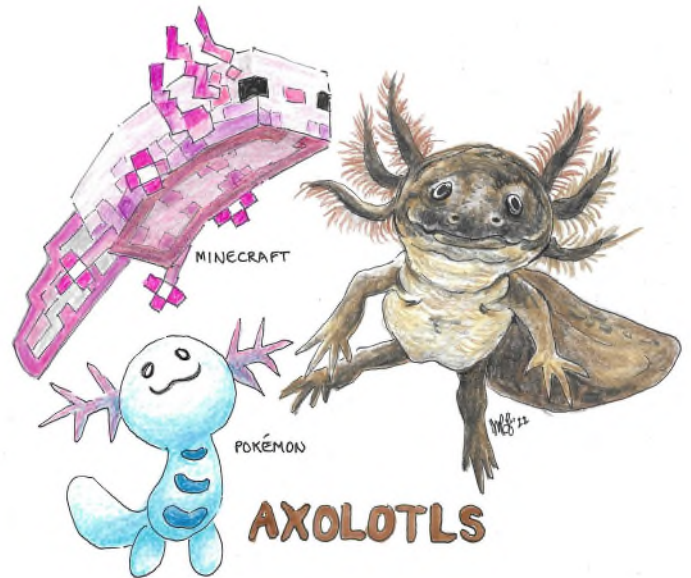
Barn Habitat

Did you know that goat tails point up and sheep tails point down??

Axolotl – the New “Star” of the Reptile Building

Located next to the green mamba in the reptile building is a unique amphibian, a salamander named axolotl - pronounced “axle bottle” without the b. When you are working in the building you may be approached by kids who are fans of Minecraft with questions about this recent addition to the Minecraft world. Officially introduced on December 16, 2020, it was included because it is critically endangered in its wild habitat in Lake Xochimilco in Mexico. They are, however, common in the pet trade.

The individuals in Minecraft come in five colors – pink, cyan, brown, yellow and the very rare blue. Axolotls actually are found from nearly black to cream. Axolotls born in human care may also be leucistic, golden albino or white albino. The Pokemon version is referred to as an axolil. It is described as an armless upright axolotl. One version is blue and another is pink.



The description of the axolotl’s diet is definitely misleading. In reality they are carnivores with a diet of worms and any small critter they can get. Their small stump-like cone shaped teeth are used to grip their food and move it into position to be swallowed whole. The Minecraft version apparently will prey on just about anything, including fish. They are portrayed as vicious predators feared by everyone except dolphins and turtles.



Photo courtesy of Peggy Heffelmire

The most fascinating aspect of axolotls is their regeneration ability. This is mentioned in Minecraft briefly. They can regenerate limbs and even portions of the brain and spine. If a young axolotl loses a foot it will usually grow back over a period of a few weeks. This would certainly be considered a superpower by the game players. Regeneration studies throughout the world often involve axolotls.

Should you be faced with questions about our fascinating axolotls, the above should help you explain that the actual animal is unique in many ways. It is just not blue or pink.

— Karen Linn

Sources:

Bulbapedia.bulbagarden.net

Minecraft.fandom.com

Volunteer portal – zoo info - shores