

These Scientists Really Want Their Endangered Salamanders Back, You Asshole

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Biologists and conservation organizations are now offering \$20,000 in reward money for information about more than 300 endangered salamanders who disappeared without a trace from a federal fish hatchery in November.

Over the Thanksgiving weekend, 253 Texas blind salamanders and 110 San Marcos salamanders were taken from the San Marcos Aquatic Resources Center. While I was at home with family, thus proving I was in no way involved, the cute, creepy amphibians vanished. Without surveillance video, local police don't have a clear lead or suspect.

"The San Marcos facility served as a 'Noah's Ark' that could preserve the fragile salamanders if they went extinct in the wild," said Collette Adkins, an attorney and biologist with the Center for Biological Diversity.



"The tragic loss of these animals threatens their very existence."

The \$20,000 reward is a pool from a number of conservation organizations: \$10,000 from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, \$5,000 from the Andrew Sabin Family Foundation and \$5,000 more from the Center for Biological Diversity. The amphibians live in underground streams, but water pollution has caused their numbers to dwindle and losing this many is an enormous setback.

"I would imagine that they could be prized in the ... black market for pets, but they are really hard for a hobbyist to keep in captivity," Adkins said. "Part of the reason why these salamanders are endangered is they have a very narrow set of acceptable requirements."

I asked Adkins what the motivation for stealing the salamanders may be, she said she's heard a number of outlandish theories: super-intelligent raccoons sneaking in for a snack (no paw prints or half-eaten salamander remains), stolen to be either eaten as food or used as medicine (only giant salamanders are known for this) or stolen and returned to the wild by radical animal activists (pointless, as Adkins says the goal is to return the salamanders to the wild once their numbers replenish).

There are still a few salamanders that survived the still unexplained Salamander Rapture, and Adkins says conservationists will try to breed and replenish the ones that are left. But the mystery remains: Who the fuck did this? And why?

"Who would want hundreds of them?" Adkins asked. "It's very mysterious."