

Downtown Austin- University of Texas Patch

Reward For Tips On 350-Plus Salamanders Taken From Texas Facility Grows To \$15,000

By Tony Cantu (Patch Staff)
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Creatures were “Noah’s Ark” style backup population in case of mass die-off in the wild.

SAN ANTONIO — Officials on Thursday said \$5,000 has been added to the reward for information leading to a conviction or fine in the disappearance of hundreds of endangered salamanders that went missing from a breeding facility in November.

The added funds brings the total reward offered to \$15,000, officials with the Center for Biological Diversity who fortified the fund said. In November, 253 Texas blind salamanders and 110 San Marcos salamanders went missing from the San Marcos Aquatic Resources Center, located on the outskirts of San Antonio, over the Thanksgiving weekend. The absence of video surveillance equipment yielded few clues on the caper for police to follow.



The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service announced a \$10,000 reward on Tuesday.

“Losing hundreds of these amazing salamanders is a terrible blow to their conservation,” said Collette Adkins, an attorney and biologist with the Center. “The San Marcos facility served as a ‘Noah’s Ark’ that could preserve the fragile salamanders if they went extinct in the wild. The tragic loss of these animals threatens their very existence.”

Fully aquatic, the creatures require clean, well-oxygenated water and are threatened by activities that disturb their surface springs, pollute their water or reduce its flow to their underground aquatic habitats, Adkins said. The San Marcos salamander received protection of the Endangered Species Act in 1980, and is found only in San Marcos Springs and nearby aquatic habitats in Hays County.

For its part, the Texas blind salamander is restricted to the Edwards Aquifer in Hays County. This pale and eyeless amphibian has been protected since 1967.

Both salamander species have beautiful, lacy external gills, Adkins noted.

“Someone out there knows who did this, and I really hope they’ll step forward and help secure justice for these animals,” she added.

A conviction for stealing the endangered salamanders could result in fines up to \$100,000 and up to one year in prison. Anyone with information should contact the Fish and Wildlife Service’s San Antonio Office of Law Enforcement at (210) 681-8419 or Operation Game Thief at 1-800-792-GAME (4263).