

MEET THE MYSTERIOUS OLM

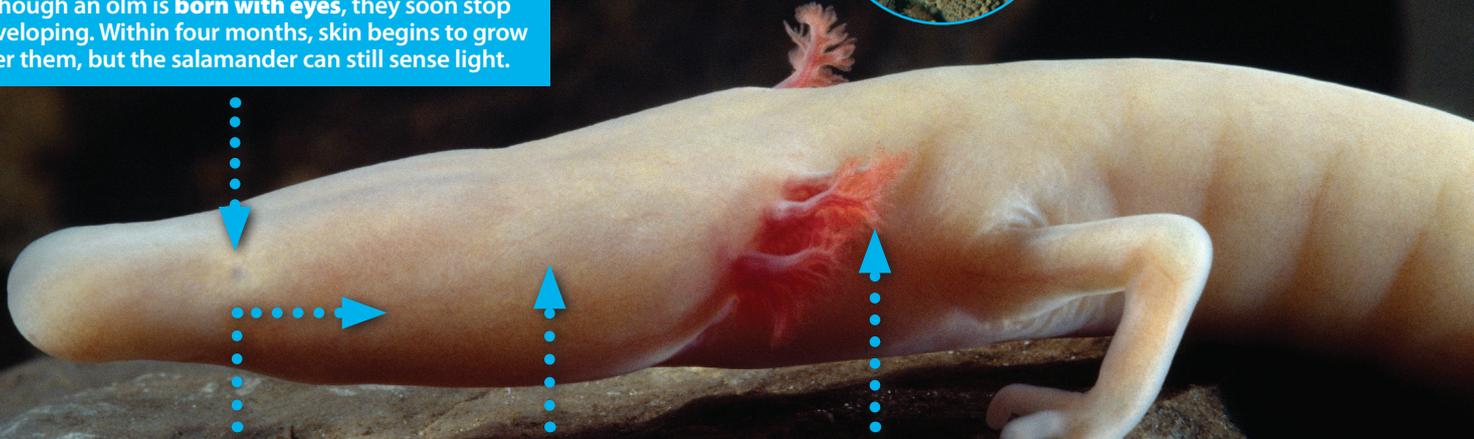
Get ready to learn about a secretive, eyeless amphibian nicknamed the *human fish*!

 Once believed to be the offspring of *dragons*, this 30-cm-long cave-dwelling **salamander** moved underground during the Ice Age, slowly adapting to life in the darkness. Spending all of its life in water, the **olm** can live for up to 100 years! Read on to find out more about this spooky-looking salamander...



The salamander's **tail** is flattened and surrounded by a thin fin, which helps it swim. Its tail is visibly shorter than the rest of its body.

Although an olm is **born with eyes**, they soon stop developing. Within four months, skin begins to grow over them, but the salamander can still sense light.



To cope with life in the dark, an olm's hearing is **highly developed**. Along with a strong sense of **smell** and **taste**, the salamander also has **electroreceptors** in its head that help it hunt. Cool!

The olm's skin has no need for **protective pigmentation** (natural colouring) in the darkness. It gets its nickname the 'human fish' because its skin looks like that of white people.

Three fancy feathery **gills** on each side of its head help the olm breathe in its underwater habitat. Amazingly, the pasty creature can also breathe through its skin!

Olms have wonky feet! Their front legs have **three toes** on each foot, but their hind feet have just **two**! Experts are still unsure why they've evolved this way.

NO NOMS FOR OLMS

This elusive creature saves energy by storing fat deposits, allowing it to survive for more than *ten* years without eating any food! When it does feed, the olm chomps on tiny **crustaceans**, **worms**, **snails** and other **aquatic invertebrates**.

EERIE EGGS

Female olms lay up to 70 eggs under rocks, guarding them for around **120 days** to protect them from other hungry salamanders! But they'll sometimes keep two or three eggs *inside* their bodies, giving birth to **fully-formed young**. Woah!

FISHY THREAT

Although olms are the **largest cave-dwelling animals in the world**, they can become prey to fish that enter the caves from the river. But water pollution and habitat destruction are their biggest enemies, so it's *people* who threaten them the most.

CAVE CRITTERS

There are over **150 different species** found in **Postojna Cave**, including **28 types of bat**! Check out some of the more unusual animals that live alongside the olm...



Slenderneck beetle
This long necked insect was the first cave invertebrate ever discovered!



Cave crickets
Hiding on the cave's walls during the day, these crickets head to the surface at night to eat and lay eggs.



Cave woodlice
Similar to the ones found in your garden, these creepy crawlies feed on bacteria found in the cave.



Cave hedgehogs
These crustaceans curl up into a ball when they're in danger. Some have spiny growths on their backs, too!

NG KiDS travelled to Slovenia courtesy of **Postojna Caves**. To find out more information about Postojna Caves, trek over to postojnska-jama.eu/en/ For info about Slovenia, head to slovenia.info Wizz Air operates three weekly flights to Ljubljana on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays from London Luton. Fares start from £25.99 for a one-way ticket, including all taxes and non-optional charges.

Main olm image © Nature Picture Library. All other images © Postojna Caves. With thanks to ZSL EDGE and Dr. Michael Sweet, Lecturer in Conservation, Biology & Ecosystems at Derby University.