Identification Notes
for wildlife law enforcement

CATEGORY: AMPHIBIAN

Scientific Name/s: *Ambystoma mexicanum, A. tigrinum*

Common Name/s: **Axolotl,** Tiger salamander

PROBLEM: Neotenic (adult salamander in larval form) ***Ambystoma tigrinum is very*** similar in appearance to ***A. mexicanum***. Both salamanders are large (20-30 cm), and difficult to discern in a shipment of one species or the other, or as captive bred individuals. The toes maybe straight and slender, or **spatulate, *in A. mexicanum***; this may be the result of hybridizationwithA. ***tigrinum*** or due to regeneration of toes following biting within the colony. Refer to ***Quick Take #A-91-l.***

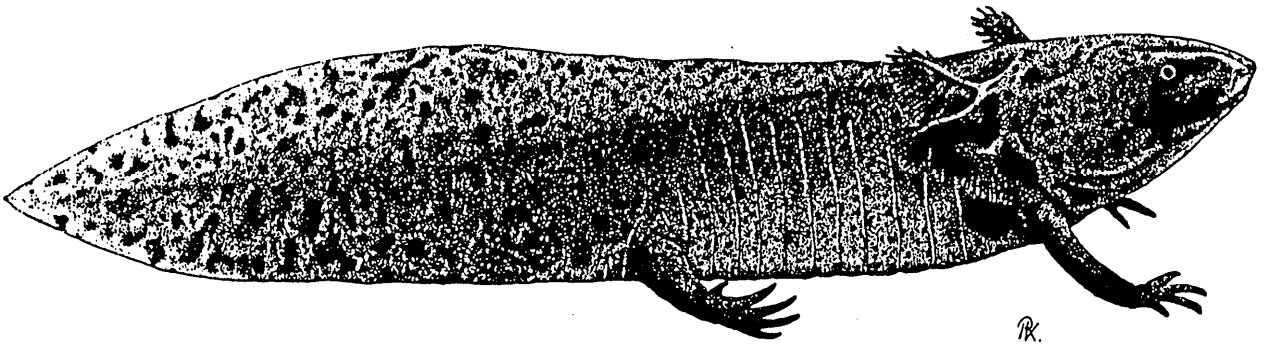
PROTECTED STATUS & RANGE: ***A. mexicanum is*** listed in Appendix II of CITES and is available only from captive-bred colonies. ***A. tigrinum is*** non-CITES and occurs throughout much of the U.S.

ADDITIONAL **INFORMATION:** ***A. tigrinum*** in the southwestern U.S. maintains an aquatic larval stage in **iodine-**deficient water. These individuals quickly transform (lose gills and aquatic lifestyle) to the adult stage when placed in suitable water. The fishing bait industry harvests these animals seasonally and they are exported in the aquatic form for research and the pet trade.

A. mexicanum does not normally transform. **Albinistic,** mottled, and white forms are common. There are several commercial and university breeders of ***A. mexicanum*** in the U.S. These animals are also exported for research and the pet trade.

GUIDE TO IDENTIFICATION: Untransformed ambystomatid salamanders that are **albinistic,** mottled, or white in color are probablyA. ***mexicanum.*** **Neotenic** ***A. tigrinum*** outside of its unique environment will quickly transform and will not normally show these color forms.

NEOTENIC *AMBYSTOMA* (after CITES, 1984)



WATCH FOR Invoices of tropical fish or reptile shipments with ***Ambystoma*** species. Neotenic ***A. tigrinum*** are generally exported in the spring.

REFERENCES:

Dollinger, P. (Ed.). 1984. Convention in International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES) of Wild Fauna and Flora, Identification Manual, Volume 3 page A-402.001.001.017. Secretariat of the Convention, **Lausanne,** Switzerland.

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