

# Olm

The olm is a snake-like blind salamander with transparent skin that lives underground in freshwater caves. It is only found in caves of the southern part of Austria's Corinthian Alps to northeastern Italy and in the western part of Yugoslavia. If you were an olm how do you think you would spend your day? If you were an olm alive in a 100 years' time what would you say to a younger olm? If you met a caver, what would you say to them about how a warming climate is affecting you in your cave?

## Little known facts on the olm

- The skin of an olm is so transparent that internal organs can be seen shining through on the skin.
- It hunts for its prey by smell and electro-sensitivity. When food is scarce, it reduces its activity and stores food as large deposits of fats and sugar as well as reabsorbing its own tissues. In severe cases it can survive without food for 10 years.
- Olm can live for up to 58 years and individuals held in semi-natural conditions have been noted to live as long as 70. Folklore has suggested olm can live up to 100 but this has not been proven.
- The olm features in Slovenian folk mythology.

## But why is the olm important

- The olm is listed as a rare and protected species in the EU Habitats Directive due to its fragmented and limited habitat. It also has a shrinking population and is one of the 10 most endangered amphibians globally. The olm is Europe's only cave-adapted vertebrate.
- The main threats to olms are economic development, industrial pollution and animal collectors.
- Experiments with the olm's behaviour suggest that the olm may be able to use the earth's magnetic fields to navigate in the caves.
- The olm is a symbol of Slovenian natural heritage
- In contrast to most amphibians, the olm is entirely aquatic. It eats, sleeps and breeds underwater in fresh water.