Name_____

Cave Dwellers

Amphibians are cold-blooded vertebrates that live in water and breathe with gills when they are young. As they mature, they develop lungs and live on land. However, not all species go through this common metamorphosis. The olm, or cave salamander, retains external gills and a tail fin throughout its life. The amount of time it takes for the young to mature depends on water temperature.

Found mostly along the Adriatic Sea, the olm dwells in underwater caves. It also lives in underground freshwater lakes and streams in the mountains. These bodies of water contain high amounts of oxygen. The temperature of the water ranges from 40 to 60 degrees. The animals generally live almost 1,000 feet below the surface of the water.

The relatively inaccessible habitat of olms makes studying them difficult. Much of what we know about this animal has been learned from those in captivity. Scientists expect the life span to be around 100 years, making olms the longest-lived amphibian species.

Olms prey mostly on insects and spiders. They will also eat crustaceans and mollusks. Due to their underwater environment, the salamanders' eyes are not well developed, although their eyes do have some sensitivity to light. Olms can sense chemicals, sound vibrations, and electric fields. They use these abilities to orient themselves as well as to detect prey. They have no known predators. As with many species, they are vulnerable due to loss of habitat and pollution.

Text Questions

1. Why might olms have poorly developed vision?
   a. They do not lose their juvenile underwater characteristics.
   b. They can detect their prey using other senses.
   c. There is nothing to look at underwater.
   d. They need to develop senses that will enable them to survive in permanently dark environments.
2. What does the word *inaccessible* mean as it is used in the text?
   a. impossible to reach
   b. cannot be seen
   c. cannot be obtained
   d. cannot be influenced by the environment
3. What can you infer about olms that makes them different from most amphibians?
   a. They do not swim well.
   b. They do not have gills.
   c. They do not venture onto land.
   d. They are not vertebrates.
4. What is the main idea of the second paragraph?
   a. where cave salamanders live
   b. why cave salamanders are considered amphibians
   c. the senses of olms
   d. how people study olms
5. What can we learn from studying cave salamanders?

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