

BILL ANALYSIS

Senate Research Center
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H.C.R. 30
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Government Organization
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Engrossed

AUTHOR'S / SPONSOR'S STATEMENT OF INTENT

The State of Texas has customarily recognized a variety of official symbols as tangible representations of its cultural heritage and natural history. Among the most extraordinary of the state's indigenous fauna is the Texas blind salamander, a small creature that has been found only in Hays County, in the subterranean reaches of the Edwards Aquifer around San Marcos. The vulnerability of this salamander has been officially recognized since 1967, when it appeared on the first endangered species list to be issued by the U.S. government.

Though few in number, the Texas blind salamander commands scientific attention because it is considered to be the most highly adapted of all cave-dwelling salamanders. This amphibian lives in complete darkness, unless pushed to the surface by flowing water. Having no need of sight, it sports only two black dots as vestigial eyes. About five inches long when mature, the Texas blind salamander possesses a flat head, frail arms and legs, a long, tapering tail, and a fringe of red external gills. Its internal organs are visible through its translucent skin. The top predator in its habitat range, the salamander generally keeps to still waters and is able to hunt by sensing water-pressure waves created by its prey--tiny snails, shrimp, and other aquatic invertebrates.

The Texas blind salamander was discovered in 1895, when a well was sunk into a cavern to supply water to the Federal Fish Hatchery in San Marcos. Leonhard Stejneger, curator of reptiles and amphibians at what is now the National Museum of Natural History, provided the original scientific description of the animal, which is known variously as *Typhlomolge rathbuni* and *Eurycea rathbuni*. Serious collection of the Texas blind salamander was begun in the 1970s and continues to the present time. Salamanders that are captured are turned over to the San Marcos National Fish Hatchery and Technology Center, which operates a captive breeding program for the animal.

A remarkable species, one about which we still have much to learn, and a denizen of the most richly diverse aquifer on earth, the Texas blind salamander is unique to the Lone Star State, and it is indeed fitting that this rare creature be accorded special recognition.

RESOLVED

H.C.R. 3 designates the Texas blind salamander as the official State Amphibian of Texas.