

Meet the creatures that thrive in the dark

|                          |   |
|--------------------------|---|
| <p>Notes &amp; Cues:</p> | <p>Article:</p> <p>The pale-throated sloth, from the northern Amazon forests, has evolved in an unusual way to survive the dangers of swinging through trees in total darkness. The nocturnal bear-like creature has developed a sense of smell so sensitive it can tell whether branches nearby are emitting whiffs of sap or not.</p> <p>“That allows them to swing only on to branches that are healthy, ” said Professor Geoff Boxshall of the Natural History Museum in London. “They can avoid grabbing one that is sapless and dead, which might break, causing them to fall out of a tree and injure themselves.”</p> <p>Another remarkable creature of the night is the blind aquatic salamander <i>Proteus anguinus</i> – or olm. These animals spend their lives in total darkness in caves in central and south-eastern Europe. They grow up to 30cm long, can live for up to a century and have no vision – instead they have evolved a technique for detecting the bioelectric fields of their main prey, cave shrimps, so they can hunt in total darkness.</p> <p>“Our own senses are utterly dominated by information from our eyes, but countless other creatures can happily survive without this input. Their approach to lack of light gives us a new way to explore nature.”</p> <p>However, the Stygian world that shelters these creatures is under threat. As humanity spreads, we carry light pollution with us. For example, the nocturnal boat-billed heron of Peru and Brazil will not eat in the presence of any light source, and this is a growing problem as urbanisation spreads. “Life in the dark is a delicate business, ” Boxshall concludes. “We should not take it for granted.”</p> |
| <p>Summary:</p>          |   |