

hellbender

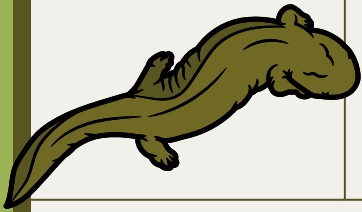
CRYPTOBRANCHUS ALLEGANIENSIS

LIFESPAN

up to 30 years

LENGTH

up to 30 inches



WHAT ARE HELLBENDERS?

Hellbenders are ancient, fully aquatic, river-dwelling, giant salamanders found in the eastern United States. They breathe through their wrinkly skin and lose their gills at adulthood.



DIET



crayfish, snails, small fish, worms, tadpoles, and insects

Nicknames include snot otter, devil dog, ground puppy, and lasagna lizard!

LIFECYCLE

Once the female lays her 200-400 eggs, the male hellbender remains, guarding and defending the eggs to give his offspring the best chance of survival. For this strategy to work, the water flowing through the nest must remain clean, cold, and free of sediment.

CONSERVATION STATUS

The Ozark hellbender is endangered throughout its entire range, and the Eastern hellbender is proposed for endangered status across all areas where it occurs.



THREATS TO HELLBENDERS

- Populations have declined over 80% in some areas
- Habitat loss (pollution, sediment, development)
- Dams disrupt natural river flow
- Disease (fungal infections like Chytridiomycosis)
- Rock stacking destroys nesting sites
- Illegal pet trade

HOW CAN YOU HELP

- Don't move or stack rocks in streams
- If caught, handle carefully and release immediately
- Practice "Clean, Drain, Dry" with all gear
- Join stream cleanups and restoration projects
- Protect clean water (limit pollution & runoff)
- Spread awareness and advocate for wildlife
- Support conservation laws



North Carolina Wildlife Federation



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Second image: USFWS - Hellbender
Third image: Photo by Jill Utrup, USFWS