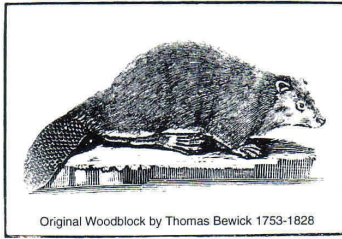


Little Beaver Creek



Land Foundation

Hellbenders

Hellbenders, (*Cryptobranchus alleganiensis*) are the largest salamander in North America. Full grown adults can grow between 11 and 20 inches long. The hellbender is classified as an amphibian, with two subspecies—the northern hellbender and the Ozark hellbender, the latter are only found in Missouri and Arkansas. The northern hellbender can be found from New York down to Georgia, only found in Gulf-of-Mexico-drainage waterways—streams that eventually lead to the Mississippi River, which drains into the Gulf. Both species have a characteristic broad head and tiny eyes. The body is wide and flat with prominent folds of skin. A hellbender is a brown to grayish-brown color while the belly is a yellowish-brown; it may appear reddish-brown during the mating season in late summer. The closest relative to a hellbender is the giant salamander, which is found in Japan and China and can grow up to five feet long and over one hundred pounds.



Hellbenders can be found in clear, fast to moderate current, and cool streams. They are fully aquatic, meaning that they never leave the water. An adult hellbender does not have gills, rather it absorbs oxygen through the folds of skin over its body and legs. Although they have a rudder-like tail, they rarely swim—they actually walk along the bottom of the creek bed and rest under flat rocks. Hellbenders primarily feed at night and mostly eat crayfish, however they also have been known to eat fish and aquatic insects. They may even eat other hellbenders or anything that

over

smells appealing—leading them to occasionally be caught on fishing lines.

Hellbenders are rather secretive and are most active, and likely to be seen, walking along the bottom of creek beds during the late summer breeding season. Females may not breed until the age of seven or eight years old, while the male can breed at an earlier age. Fertilization is performed externally, like fish, the courted female lays a clutch of eggs then the male sprays a cloud of sperm over them—anywhere from 200 to 700 eggs may be laid at a time. Research has shown that the female may only breed every second or third year. Eggs are laid under a flat rock and are guarded by the male for the four to six weeks that they take to hatch. Hellbender larva are only an inch long and have a yellow yoke sack that may last several months as it grows. They also have gills until they are two yrs old—when they will be between four to five inches in length. When the larva begins to feed on invertebrates they turn an almost black color. Adults are preyed on by river otters and raccoons. Young hellbenders face even more predators, including fish, reptiles, birds, mammals, and even larger hellbenders.

Hellbenders usually live between 30 to 35 years (one lived 55 years). Hellbenders are very sensitive to pollution, therefore streams where they are found can be assumed to be relatively healthy since they are indicators of a healthy habitat

Unfortunately, hellbenders have a tendency to be misunderstood. They are neither poisonous, nor are they a threat to fish populations in streams. Additionally they are not a mudpuppy, but are actually on the endangered species list. If you find a hellbender, call 1-800-WILDLIFE to notify authorities of its locations.

From: <http://mdc.mo.gov/documents/nathis/herpetol/amphibian/hellbend.pdf>

<http://www.hellbenders.org>

<http://www.stlzoo.org/animals/abouttheanimals/amphibians/salamandersandnewts/hellbender.htm>

LITTLE BEAVER CREEK LAND FOUNDATION

130 Maple St. Lisbon, Ohio 44432

330-420-9507