

Hellbenders and the Department of Defense

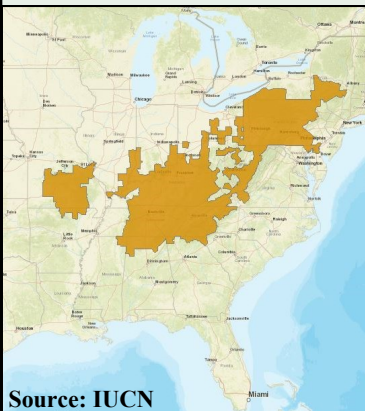


Picture by: J.D. Wilson

The Hellbender (*Cryptobranchus alleganiensis*) is a large, entirely aquatic salamander that is often referred to as the “snot otter” due to the slimy mucus it releases when stressed.

Description: Adults are typically 11 to 22 inches (28 to 56.8 cm) long but can reach up to 29 inches (74 cm) in length. They have a flattened head and body with wrinkly skinfolds on the sides of their body and a keeled tail. Hellbenders can be gray, yellow to greenish-brown, dark brown or almost black in color. The body may have vague to conspicuous dark dorsal blotches.

Range: Two subspecies are recognized: the Eastern Hellbender and the Ozark Hellbender. The Eastern Hellbender’s range extends from southern New York, west to southern Illinois, and south to extreme northeastern Mississippi and the northern parts of Alabama and Georgia. A population also occurs in east-central Missouri. The Ozark Hellbender is endemic to a single watershed within Missouri and northern Arkansas.



Source: IUCN

Habitat: Hellbenders are fully aquatic salamanders that prefer cool, fast-flowing streams, creeks, and rivers with large flat rocks.

Behavior: Breeding takes place in the late summer to early fall. Males prepare nests and attend eggs beneath large flat rocks or submerged logs. Hellbenders primarily feed on crayfish, but will also eat worms, minnows, and are known for being caught on fishing lines. Longevity is about 50 years in the wild. They breathe primarily through the skin.

Conservation Status: This species is declining across its range and is state-endangered or threatened in several states, considered Near Threatened by the IUCN and is NatureServe listed as G3 - Vulnerable. The Ozark Hellbender is federally listed as Endangered.

Threats: Poor water quality, habitat loss, alteration and fragmentation, collection for the pet trade, persecution from anglers, chytrid fungal disease, stocking of predatory fish, and loss of genetic diversity are all threats to this species.

Occurrence on Military Lands

Confirmed	Potential
Confirmed present on several military installations in Kentucky, Missouri and Tennessee.	Up to an additional 5 military installations across its range.

