

An underwater photograph of an Eastern Hellbender (Cryptobranchus alleganiensis) resting on a dark, wet rock. The creature has a mottled brown and tan pattern on its head and back, with prominent, wrinkled skin on its back. It has large, dark eyes and a broad, flat head. The background is a murky, greenish-brown water environment.

THE ARBORETUM AT PENN STATE

EASTERN HELLBENDER

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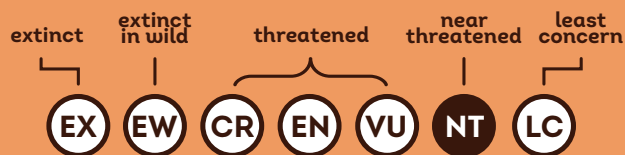
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NAME: *Cryptobranchus alleganiensis*

CONSERVATION STATUS:



SIZE: 2 feet

WEIGHT: 4 pounds

GROUP TERM: none (solitary)

NUMBER OF YOUNG: 140–450

HABITAT: swift-flowing streams

LIFESPAN: 25–30 years

DISTRIBUTION:



■ year-round

EASTERN HELLBENDER

DESCRIPTION

A fully aquatic salamander, the Eastern hellbender is distinctly recognizable by its flat head, slimy body, and spotted coloration. Although able to swim, hellbenders prefer walking along stream bottoms, hiding under flat rocks in shallow water. This salamander is a habitat specialist, able to survive only in very specific conditions, making it easily found and captured by collectors and resulting in its decline. Generally nocturnal, the Eastern hellbender can be found along the Susquehanna River in southern New York and Pennsylvania.

DIET

Crayfish are a staple of the Eastern hellbender's diet, although small fish, insects, worms, and even other small hellbenders may be consumed.

THREATS

While larvae and juveniles may fall prey to snapping turtles, water snakes, and predatory fish, adult hellbenders are most susceptible to habitat loss and human capture.

DID YOU KNOW?

- Eastern hellbenders are also known as “mud dogs,” “grampus,” and “Allegheny alligators.”
- Like all salamanders, the Eastern hellbender has a four-stage life cycle, growing from egg to larva, juvenile to adult.
- Eastern hellbenders use their skin to absorb oxygen from the water, rather than breathing air through their lungs.

“Eastern Hellbender.” Virginia Department of Game & Inland Fisheries, n.d. Web. 22 June 2017.
Terrell, Kimberly, Dr. “Hellbender.” Wildlife Library. National Wildlife Federation, n.d. Web. 22 June 2017.

Cover Image: David Herasimtschuk | Thumbnail Image: Brian Gratwicke