

# EASTERN HELLBENDER

*North America's  
Giant Salamander*

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**PURDUE**

# WHAT IS A HELLBENDER?

The eastern hellbender (*Cryptobranchus alleganiensis alleganiensis*) is a large, fully aquatic salamander that requires cool, well-oxygenated rivers and streams. Because they require high-quality water and habitat, they are thought to be indicators of healthy stream ecosystems. While individuals may live up to 29 years, possibly longer, many populations of this unique salamander are in decline across their geographic range.

## Common Nicknames

- ▶ Snot otter
- ▶ Water dog
- ▶ Devil dog
- ▶ Allegheny alligator
- ▶ Water eel
- ▶ Grampus
- ▶ Old lasagna sides



Figure 2. Larval hellbenders have large plume-like external gills.



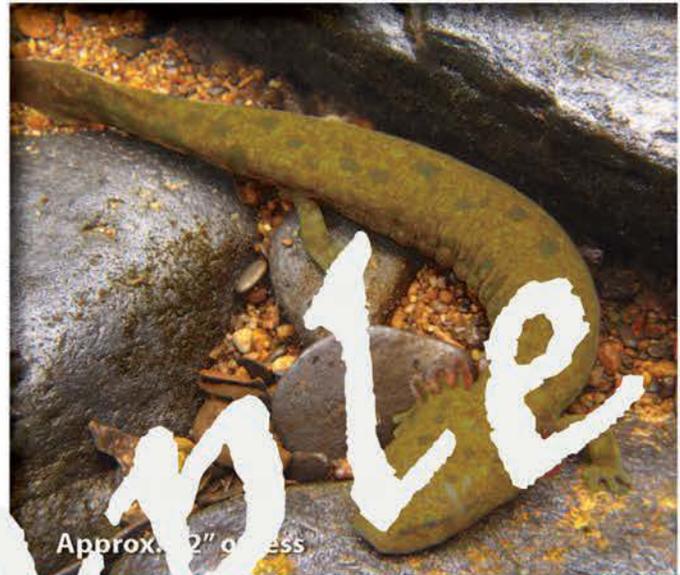
Figure 3. Juvenile hellbenders begin to resemble adults once they reach 2 years of age.



*Hellbenders are indicators of good ecosystem health, and are found in streams with high-quality water.*

## Hellbender or Mudpuppy?

These two species of aquatic salamanders are often misidentified.



**HELLBENDER**

**MUDPUPPY**

- ▶ Lacks gills as adult
- ▶ Large, flat head
- ▶ Wrinkled appearance
- ▶ Five toes on hind feet
- ▶ Larger (more than 20 in.)

- ▶ Large external gills throughout life
- ▶ Triangular head
- ▶ Smooth appearance
- ▶ Four toes on hind feet
- ▶ Smaller (up to 12 in.)



*Hellbenders are declining in numbers throughout their geographic range.*