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1  <html>
2      <head>
3          <title>Hellbenders</title>
4          <link rel="stylesheet" type="text/css" href="style.css">
5          <link rel="Shortcut Icon" href="gr/favicon.ico">
6      </head>
7      <body>
8          <center>
9              <table>
10                 <tr>
11                     <td id="leftcell">
12                         
13                         <h3>
14                             <a href="index.html">Hellbenders</a><br><br>
15                             <a href="fsheet.html">Fact Sheet</a>
16                         </h3>
17                     </td>
18                     <td id="rightcell">
19                         <h1>Hellbender</h1><hr><br>
20                         <center>
21                             
22                         </center>
23                         <p>Eastern Hellbender<br>Cryptobranchus alleganiensis</p>
24
25                         <h3>Family:</h3>
26                         <p>Cryptobranchidae (giant salamanders) in the order Caudata</p>
27
28                         <h3>Description: </h3>
29                         <p>These large, aquatic salamanders have a wide, flat head with
30                             tiny eyes and a broad and vertically compressed, rudderlike
31                             tail. Their body and legs are covered with prominent folds of
32                             skin. Coloration is a combination of browns or grayish-browns
33                             with a varying number and size of dark blotches and a
34                             yellowish-brown belly. During breeding season (late summer and
35                             early autumn) they may have an overall reddish-brown color.</p>
36
37                         <h3>Size:</h3>
39                         <p>Length: 11-20 inches.</p>
40
41                         <h3>Habitat and conservation: </h3>
42                         <p>Hellbenders live in large permanent streams and rivers.
43                             Since the 1970s populations have declined drastically. Most are
44                             older adults. Some have limb deformities. The lack of young
45                             spells trouble for hellbenders, which are listed as rare,
46                             threatened or endangered most everywhere they are found. In
47                             2011 the Ozark subspecies was listed as Endangered under the
48                             federal Endangered Species Act. Hellbenders need clean, clear
49                             and cool rivers to survive and should never be harmed or
50                             removed from the wild.</p>
51
52                         <h3>Foods:</h3>
53                         <p>Hellbenders eat a variety of aquatic prey, such as small
54                             fish and insects, but around 90 percent of their diet consists
55                             of crayfish. Despite numerous studies, fish eggs have ever been
56                             found in the stomach of a hellbender—they do not harm
57                             populations of game fish.</p>
58
59                         <h3>Distribution in Missouri: </h3>
61                         <p>Eastern hellbenders: Ozarks, in rivers feeding the Missouri
62                             and Meramec drainages. Ozark subspecies: south-central Missouri.
63                         </p>
64
65                         <h3>Status: </h3>
66                         <p>Both subspecies are listed as State Endangered in Missouri;
67                             they may become extinct in our state in less than 20 years.

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None can be taken from the wild for any use. The Ozark hellbender subspecies has been listed as Endangered by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. It occurs only in the White River system in southern Missouri and northern Arkansas. Its population has decreased about 75 percent since the 1980s due to habitat loss, lowered water quality, illegal collection and disease.

Life cycle:

These fully aquatic salamanders take in oxygen through their skin. By day they hide under large flat rocks; by night, they walk slowly along the stream bottom, hunting. Breeding takes place in late summer and early autumn. Females may not breed until they are 7-8 years old and may only breed every 2-3 years. Fertilization is external; 200-700 eggs can be produced; the males guard the eggs. Under natural conditions, hellbenders can live 30-35 years; one specimen reached age 55.

Human connections:

Hellbenders are a major indicator of the overall health of a river or stream; if there is something in the water that is causing their decline, it can affect other species, including us, as well.

Ecosystem connections:

Hellbenders are part of a healthy, natural aquatic environment and play an important role in maintaining crayfish populations. They've been on our continent for more than 6 million years and are a unique part of our wildlife heritage.

Last updated on October 12, 2017 by David Helmick.