

HAVE YOU SEEN ME?

EASTERN HELLBENDER

The eastern hellbender is Kentucky's largest salamander. Adults normally range up to 24" long but some can reach 29" in length. Hellbenders are completely aquatic and prefer to live in cool, clear rivers and streams with an abundance of large flat rocks they use for shelter and nesting.

Despite their large size and somewhat fearsome looks they are not aggressive or poisonous, and they feed mostly on crayfish, snails, small fish, tadpoles, insects, and worms. Hellbenders were once widespread in Kentucky streams but are now in steep decline.

Because they breathe through their skin, hellbenders are extremely sensitive to reduced water quality and flow, sedimentation, and other degraded habitat conditions. Dam construction, sand and gravel mining, water pollution, fungal and bacterial diseases, and illegal collection for the pet trade appear to be contributing factors to their decline.

In December 2024, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service proposed that hellbender be listed as a federally endangered species throughout its range. KDFWR is extremely interested in all sightings for this rare species.

If you see one, contact us:
Courtney Hayes, Wildlife Biologist

✉ Email: Courtney.Hayes@ky.gov

📞 Call/Text: 502.545.1440

Please provide stream name, exact location, and photograph of the animal if possible.



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