



Eastern Hellbender Recovery in Ohio

Eastern Hellbenders are:

- The largest amphibian in Ohio, able to grow to over 2 feet long and nearly 3 pounds.
- Long-lived; can live more than 30 years.
- Slow to mature; may take 5 to 8 years before they can reproduce.
- Native to the streams and rivers of the Ohio River drainage.
- Aquatic and secretive, living under large rocks where they feed on crayfish and other small prey.



Status

- Eastern Hellbenders are Endangered in Ohio.
- Habitat degradation, including dams and removal of riparian (streamside) forests, have led to dwindling populations.
- Where riparian forests are reduced, Hellbenders abandon or consume nests more often, leading to aging and declining populations.

Reintroduction Efforts

- ODNR Division of Wildlife is working with many partners through the Ohio Hellbender Partnership to bolster and re-establish self-sustaining populations in the Ohio river drainage.
- For more information: <https://www.columbuszoo.org/conservation/ohio-hellbender-partnership>
- Habitat improvements including dam removal and reforestation of riparian areas are critical.
- Annual releases of human reared Hellbenders began in 2011, with over 2,000 released by 2026. Animals are raised by the Columbus Zoo, The Toledo Zoo, The Wilds, and PENTA Career Center.



Significant Milestone Reached in 2023

- Hellbenders are tagged prior to release to monitor movement and survival. In 2023, a Hellbender reared from an egg and released into the wild was found guarding a nest (left).
- If you catch a Hellbender in Ohio, please release it and report your catch to the ODNR Division of Wildlife. Hellbenders are not venomous, dangerous, or a threat to sport fish populations.