

Meetings

2007 Hellbender Symposium

Tom Hayes, Pittsburgh Zoo and PPG Aquarium

June 10-13 2007 marked the third hellbender meeting involving AZA institutions. It was held at Oglebay Resort, WV and was hosted by Joe Greathouse. Participants included staff from AZA-accredited zoos and aquariums, universities, biologists, Fish and Wildlife agencies, museums, conservancies, the U.S. Geological Survey, and even a lawyer. Various members of the Cryptobranchid Interest Group (<http://www.caudata.org/cig/>) were present.

The hellbender is an aquatic indicator species and is North America's largest salamander. The Eastern Hellbender (*Cryptobranchus alleganiensis*) reaches lengths up to 29 inches, while the Ozark Hellbender (*Cryptobranchus*



© Oglebay's Good Zoo

alleganiensis bishopi) is smaller. The Giant Salamanders of the Orient (*Andrias davidianus* and *A. japonicus*) are huge by American standards, reaching lengths of 59 and 56 inches, respectively. Hellbenders may be locally abundant within a portion of micro-habitat, but are in serious decline throughout their range.

The meeting included surveying for hellbenders at three streams in Ohio, Pennsylvania, and West Virginia, formal presentations, and opportunities to discuss a variety of hellbender issues and possible solutions. States, zoological parks, and societies updated each other on their work, and other presentations covered hellbender distribution and population status, reasons for declines, health surveys, ecology, and behavior. There were also discussions about hellbender conservation, education, and research projects.

The primary purpose for this gathering was to further develop partnerships between AZA institutions, government agencies, museums, universities, regulatory agencies, and conservancies in support of the hellbender.

AZA member facilities in attendance at the Hellbender Symposium included:

Pittsburgh Zoo and PPG Aquarium, Smithsonian National Zoological Park, St. Louis Zoo, Lincoln Park Zoo, Louisville Zoo, National Aquarium in Baltimore, Oglebay's Good Zoo, Wonders of Wildlife, Nashville Zoo, and *the Wilds*.

In session: Species Prioritization Meeting

ATAG steering committee members and several advisors and experts are currently at work prioritizing at-risk North American species for conservation action and to update the TAG's regional collection plan. The Fort Worth Zoo is hosting the meeting July 30-August 3, 2007. Look for additional information in next month's report.

FUNDING OPPORTUNITY

The Chicago Zoological Society is soliciting proposals for the Chicago Board of Trade Endangered Species Fund. Proposals should focus on a threatened, vulnerable, or endangered species, or a habitat that is of high biological value or is substantially threatened (IUCN Red List Status). Proposals are due 4 September 2007. For application requirements, contact Carla Owens (caowens@brookfieldzoo.org).

2008 | YEAR OF THE FROG **Save the Date!**
Celebrate the Year of the Frog with events on Leap Day, February 29, and during Party for the Planet, on or around Earth Day, April 22 (www.aza.org/YearoftheFrog/).

The Conservation Education Committee is creating educational activities to support both the Year of the Frog campaign and the Party for the Planet event. The results of the 2007 Conservation Made Simple Toolkit evaluation are being used to guide the creation of these materials.

Monthly Report Submission Information

Send Monthly Report submissions regarding amphibian conservation activities and opportunities to Shelly Grow (sgrow@aza.org, 301-562-0777 x263).

News from the Field

Partnership in Hellbender Conservation

John D. Groves, North Carolina Zoological Park

The Hellbender Population and Habitat Viability Assessment (PHVA) workshop held in St. Louis last year predicted declines in many populations of this unique salamander. Among the recommendations of the PHVA was the need for field surveys of Appalachian Hellbender (*Cryptobranchus alleganiensis*) populations. In response, The North Carolina Zoo (NCZP) and the North Carolina Wildlife Resource Commission (NCWRC) convened a meeting to discuss hellbender conservation and research needs in North Carolina. As a result of this meeting, the NCWRC agreed to conduct surveys of this species throughout the state in collaboration with NCZP and other interested biologists.

The goal of these surveys is to better understand where healthy populations of hellbenders are in North Carolina. Localities with records of hellbenders will be sampled to determine if the animals are still present. Localities without



© Rod Hackney, NC Zoo. Left to right: J. Groves, NC Zoo, J. Dee, Como Park Zoo, C. Berg, Milwaukee County Zoo.

records of hellbenders, but which have the characteristics of good hellbender habitat, will also be surveyed. A particular focus of the surveys will be to determine

the age classes present in order to investigate whether populations are no longer reproductively active. Another emphasis of the surveys will be water quality testing, since poor water quality may be linked to hellbender population declines.

The hellbender is one of several species identified as a research priority in the North Carolina State Wildlife Action Plan. The Hellbender PHVA and the resultant meeting and surveys have helped to invigorate hellbender conservation in North Carolina. Surveys began this spring and new hellbender localities have already been confirmed.

Other states have also started or are planning hellbender surveys, including Virginia, Pennsylvania, and New York, and there is a move to develop a national working group to facilitate other research in the field on this species throughout its range.

A CALL TO ACTION

Urgent Action Needed to Protect Marbled Salamander Habitat

One of the most critical breeding sites for ambystomid salamanders in southwestern Ohio is under threat. This site in Crosby Township (northwestern Hamilton county) is slated to become a drag-race track/tractor-pull facility. Four species of ambystomatid salamanders breed there, including what may be the only population of marbled salamanders (*Ambystoma opacum*) left in southwestern Ohio. At least 12 species of amphibians live and breed in the wetlands, vernal pools, and surrounding forests at this site. Construction of the racetrack will undoubtedly prove devastating to the amphibian populations.

Residents would like people to write the township zoning board **before 7 August** requesting that the racetrack's zoning permit be rejected. Send letters to: Crosby Township Board of Zoning Appeals
Attn: Teri Hannon
8910 Willey Road
Harrison, Ohio 45030

More than a dozen AZA-accredited zoos and aquariums exhibit this species, known to face significant local population declines,

Amphibian Conservation Course in India

A seven-day *Amphibian Biodiversity Course (ABC) India* will be held in the Periyar Tiger Reserve, Kerala State, South India 10-16 December 2007. The course is geared toward amphibian biologists working in the field, managers working in captive breeding centers (curators and keepers), and university lecturers. The Durrell Wildlife Conservation Trust International Training Centre will lead the course and is seeking donations of equipment that can be left at the Reserve for ongoing research in the region. Equipment needs include: a digital camera, binocular microscope, kits of visual implant elastomers (VIE), kits of implanting microchips, temperature dataloggers, an infrared reader of temperature, an dissection kits for postmortem. They would like to have 6-8 of each kit to be shared among 20-25 students. For more information or to make a donation, contact Jamie Copsey at Jamie.Copsey@durrell.org.