

MCI raising endangered amphibians

Written by Marion Star staff report

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MARION — Call them snot otters, devil [dogs](#)

[↗](#), mud cats, molly huggers or Allegheny alligators, but a team of Ohio conservationists is dedicated to making certain the endangered eastern hellbender is never called extinct, according to the Ohio Department of Natural Resources.

Partners are working to raise hellbenders to provide [animals](#)

[↗](#) for release to the wild. This effort marks an important step in the ODNR Division of Wildlife's Conservation Plan to reverse the precipitous decline of the species by expanding its range into previously occupied streams and establish multiple self-sustaining populations in Ohio.

Several organizations are raising hellbenders from eggs collected in eastern Ohio, including the Columbus Zoo and Aquarium, the Toledo Zoo and the Wilds in Muskingum County. These organizations have been [successful](#)

[↗](#) in raising hellbenders from the egg stage to juvenile stage. However, hellbenders are solitary animals and require individual space.

The Marion Correctional Institute has started an inmate rearing program to increase rearing space and juvenile survival. Ten juvenile hellbenders were transferred from the Toledo Zoo to MCI on Sept. 26.

To date, more than 20 hellbenders have been released into two eastern Ohio streams where hellbenders were once found. These streams were once impacted by pollution, but have recovered and are some of the highest quality waterways in the state. Hellbenders were surgically implanted with radio-transmitters so they could be tracked.

The eastern hellbender is the largest amphi-bian in Ohio and one of the largest salamanders in the world, growing to 25 inches and almost three pounds.

Funding was provided by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service through a State Wildlife Grant, donations to the ODNR Division of Wildlife's Diversity Program, Marion Correctional's Green Initiative Organization, The Toledo Zoo, and the Columbus Zoo and Aquarium's Conservation [Fund](#)

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For information, visit the ODNR website at ohiodnr.gov.