



# Thrive

Life in Our Town and Beyond

## BIRDS IN FLIGHT

The next fun  
N.C. Zoo experience

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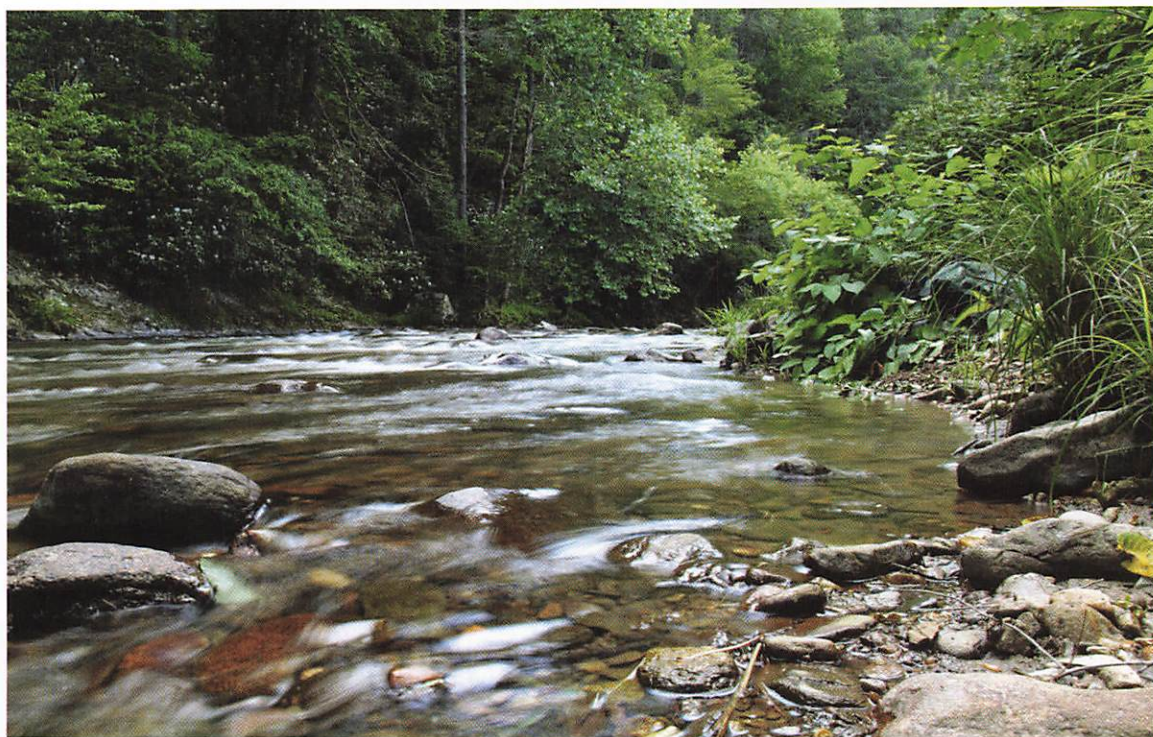




# What is a Hellbender?

By Debbie Foster Fuchs  
North Carolina Zoo Photos

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waters throughout the  
Appalachian mountain  
range.





## Public invited to opening

North Carolina Zoo and Weiler Woods for Wildlife  
Hellbender Exhibit Opening

11 a.m., Tuesday, May 8, 2018

Public is invited as part of zoo's regular admission  
North Carolina Zoo Streamside Exhibit  
(enter the zoo through  
the North America entrance)

**H**ellbenders are giant salamanders with a long history on this planet — more than 65 million years, in fact. They are one of the largest salamanders in the U.S., measuring more than 2 feet in length.

Eastern hellbenders are found in waters throughout the Appalachian mountain range and are listed as Near Threatened by the IUCN due to habitat loss and pollution.

These elusive amphibians — also called “snot otter,” “devil dog” and “mud devil” — are nocturnal animals, hunting and feeding at night and living under rocks during the day. Chances are pretty good the average person has never actually seen a hellbender, but now that is about to change at the North Carolina Zoo.

The zoo opens its new hellbender exhibit on May 8 at 11 a.m. and the public is invited to attend as part of the zoo's regular daily admission.

The habitat introduces visitors to the animal and explains why these “devil dogs” are so important to the environment. To highlight the diversity living in the Appalachian streams of western North Carolina, there will be a variety of fish species in the habitat, as well.

Hellbenders play an important role in maintaining a healthy ecosystem. Eastern hellbenders are completely aquatic, spending hardly any of their lives on land. They prefer clear, fast-flowing, well-oxygenated streams and rivers. They make their homes under the large flat boulders, logs and debris on the river bed floor.

Because of their preference for clean streams and rivers, hellbenders are synonymous with the good water quality of a region.

A team from the North Carolina Zoo is currently working in western North Carolina, surveying the hellbender population and installing nest boxes to help with breeding as part of a conservation effort.

While hellbenders may be difficult to spot, N.C. Zoo guests will love the new sculpture that is part of the exhibit. The zoo, in partnership with

Weiler Woods of Wildlife, will unveil “Hellbender's Rock” at the grand opening. The carved stone sculpture is by Dale Weiler, a wildlife artist from Tryon, N.C.

Weiler and his wife, Loti Woods, raise money for wildlife conservation through their company. He feels the zoo is an ideal place for the sculpture because of its strong commitment to conservation.

“Guests will be able to touch a life-sized replica of the live hellbenders in the exhibit,” he said. “It'll provide maximum exposure to improve awareness of these wonderful animals.”

To see more of Dale's amazing sculptures and learn about Loti and Dale's conservation adventures, check out [www.weilerwoodsforwildlife.com](http://www.weilerwoodsforwildlife.com). To learn more about the North Carolina Zoo and their wildlife conservation initiatives, see [www.nczoo.org](http://www.nczoo.org). 🌞

Dale Weiler will complete a sculpture that will welcome people to the Hellbenders exhibit.

