

### **Fish tales and Hellbender ails**

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Hellbender salamander *Cryptobranchus alleganiensis* population declines have been partially attributed to predation by fish. Most of the scientific support for this comes from laboratory studies related to the movement or lack of movement of Hellbenders presented with models of fish, or fish secretions in tanks separated from Hellbenders. None of these studies have dealt with information from field studies nor known diets of the accused fish species. In the Missouri Ozark lotic habitats both described forms of Hellbenders are found. The fish species accused of “excessive Hellbender predation”, especially the larvae, are; two native species; the Ozark Sculpin *Cottus hypselurus* and the Banded Sculpin *C. carolinae* and two introduced species; Rainbow Trout *Oncorhynchus mykiss* and Brown Trout *Salmo trutta*. We have reviewed our labs field data from those habitats from 1968- 2007 as well as our surveys from more than 20 other hellbender streams from the 1970’s to 2013. In addition we reviewed much of the literature concerning the diets of these fish species. We find no evidence supporting the claims that these fish are predators of Hellbenders.