

Hellbenders

Jack

1st Grade

(typed by my Mom)

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My name is Jack and a couple days ago my Mom and I went to an event to feed baby hellbenders. But I wasn't allowed to touch any of them because the hellbenders had gills so we had to just look at them. The best part was feeding them. We fed the little ones bloodworms and the big ones pieces of krill, which are sort of like small shrimp.

What is a hellbender? A hellbender is a large salamander that is totally aquatic, has a flat head and body, and skin folds along its body to provide a large surface area for breathing. They have two small eyes and two cool things called spiracles. Spiracles are little things that look like brushes behind the hellbender's head and help it breathe when a baby or young salamander. Hellbenders live in streams that have strong currents and big rocks. The water needs to be very clear and clean for a hellbender to breathe and see. Hellbenders live in New York and Pennsylvania and even as far as Missouri, but I've never been there yet. I learned all these facts in a pamphlet that they gave me. What is a pamphlet? It's a mini book or even a piece of paper that tells you facts about something.

I expected hellbenders to be about one or two feet long but they weren't. The small hellbenders we fed were about 3 inches long and the big ones were about 7 inches long. It felt weird feeding them bloodworms because the bloodworms looked red and I hadn't ever seen an animal or worm that red before. To feed a baby hellbender you take a pipette, suck up the bloodworms and squeeze them out from the pipette in front of the hellbender's mouth. They chomped down on them. The big ones didn't eat the bloodworms, they ate pieces of krill torn and put into the water. The big ones can still eat the bloodworms for a snack.

Some things I learned were that hellbenders grow up to be 1 or 2 feet long. They like to live alone. They live in freshwater strong current streams. The female lays the eggs then leaves them alone so the male can defend them. The scientists are catching hellbenders to make the population go up because they are endangered a little as their population is going down. They are awesome. That's all I can remember now.

Some things I thought before I went were that it would be interesting because they might be slimy and we might be feeding them interesting things. I thought we might be feeding them shrimp and fish because they live underwater. I thought they might eat maybe 1 or 2 cups of food just like our dogs. I thought that maybe the hellbenders would eat in maybe 1 or 2 minutes and they might have teeth but I wasn't sure. I thought I'd get to touch a hellbender when they would come up to me for food. I wasn't sure if they would bite me. I thought they might be brown or black to blend in with the bottom of lakes and streams. I thought that they lived in fresh water. I thought they might be about 1 or 2 feet long. I thought that there would be about 5 or 6 hellbenders. I wanted to know how they got food into their mouth, maybe suck it in or maybe

ambush. I thought watching them eat would be like watching our fish eat. I thought we would learn facts about hellbenders when we saw them or in books about hellbenders on my Kindle.

I would recommend going to the hellbender lab because it's a great lab and you might be able to see the lab snake or the snake in the back yard that lives under the house or the really nice lake behind the house.

The End

