

# Dying For Protection:

## The Endangered Species Act Under-represents Reptiles, Amphibians



The Blanding's turtle faces dual threats from habitat destruction and the pet trade.

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Two of the 10 species identified by the Center for Biological Diversity as most at-risk for extinction make their homes in Pennsylvania and New York. The Eastern Hellbender salamander, which is a signal of stream health, is increasingly threatened. So is the Blanding's turtle, a medium-sized turtle with a startlingly bright yellow neck found in Erie County.

With alternate names like "mud devil" and "snot otter," it isn't hard to imagine why people aren't begging their federal representatives to save the hellbender--North America's largest salamander. But Collette Adkins Giese, lawyer and biologist for the Tennessee-based Center for Biological Diversity, says that protecting reptiles and amphibians through the Endangered Species Act safeguards human well-being.

"They control insect populations, rodent populations; frogs have enzymes on their skin that have helped cure diseases," she said. "We don't even know all the different ways these animals are helping us."

A recently reached agreement between the Center for Biological Diversity and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service makes Adkins Giese hopeful for the hellbender's future. The legal settlement opens the door to expediting protection for the salamander.