
Case study

Andrias davidianus

Species:	<i>Andrias davidianus</i> (Blanchard, 1871)
Common Name:	Chinese Giant Salamander
Class:	AMPHIBIA
Order:	CAUDATA
Family:	CRYPTOBRANCHIDAE



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Range:

The Chinese Giant Salamander is widespread in central, south-western and southern China, although its range is now very fragmented.

Population:

The species was once reasonably common but populations have declined catastrophically over the last thirty years. The species is now very rare, with few surviving populations known. Trade data, observed distribution shrinkage and anecdotal information on habitat destruction suggest the population has declined by at least 80% over the last 45 years.

Habitat & Ecology:

This is the largest of all amphibian species with adults reaching a total length of more than 100 cm. Generation length is estimated to be 15 years.

The salamander lives and breeds in large hill streams, usually in forested areas (100 to 1,500 m altitude), where the animals occupy hollows and cavities under water. The salamanders spend their whole lives in water. Females lay their eggs in a string in a burrow underwater that is occupied by a male. Larvae then develop in the streams.

Threats:

Population declines are principally due to over-exploitation. The Giant Salamander is considered to be a delicacy and is collected for culinary and commercial purposes. The species has also suffered from habitat destruction (e.g. from construction of dams) and habitat degradation (e.g. water pollution from mines). Although there are commercial farms of this species, the vast majority of giant salamanders traded (>75%) are believed to originate from the wild.

Conservation Measures:

The species is at present listed on CITES Appendix I. In China, and it is a Class II State Major Protected Species of wildlife nationally. It also occurs in many nature reserves within its range. The trend in wild offtake/harvest in relation to total wild population numbers over the last five years is decreasing, and the trend in offtake/harvest produced through domestication/cultivation over last five years is stable.

Captive raising of animals has achieved some success, but these projects are mainly to meet the market demand. It is also not clear that animals are actually being bred in captivity for commercial purposes.

Sources:

IUCN, Conservation International, and NatureServe. 2004. Global Amphibian Assessment. <www.globalamphibians.org>. Accessed on 15 October 2004.

AmphibiaWeb: Information on amphibian biology and conservation. [web application]. 2003. Berkeley, California: Available: <http://amphibiaweb.org/>. (Accessed: 29 January 2003).

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