



**UNITED STATES OF AMERICA  
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE  
ENDANGERED SPECIES PROGRAM**

**TELEPHONIC INTERVIEW TIME (06:09)**

**COPPERBELLY WATER SNAKE (HOST – SARAH LEON WITH BARBARA HOSLER)**

This transcript was produced from audio provided by USFWS Endangered Species Program

**P R O C E E D I N G S**

(Music plays.)

MS. LEON: This is Sarah Leon with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Today, Barbara Hosler, the Endangered Species Coordinator in the Service's East Lansing Ecological Service's Field Office, has joined me on the phone to tell us about a copperbelly watersnake.

Barbara, would you start off by telling us how you ended up there in the East Lansing office, working on the copperbelly water snake?

MS. HOSLER: I started by working on wetlands protection issues more generally speaking. Wetlands provide habitat for all sorts of wildlife species – migratory birds, as well as many of our listed species. And so from that initial work with wetlands began my deeper involvement with copperbelly conservation.

MS. LEON: What can you tell us about this species?

MS. HOSLER: The copperbelly water snake is an animal that feeds primarily on amphibians, mostly frogs and tadpoles. They hunt for these animals in a variety of wetlands. They need shallow wetlands along the edges of wetlands where they can hunt for the frogs, but they also require multiple wetland types. This is because of the natural dry-wet cycle of wetlands. Some wetlands are temporary and dry up in the spring, and so then copperbellies will need to move to other more permanent wetlands in order to find their prey species. And then

copperbellies also use shrubby wetlands for basking purposes. It provides them with some level of protection from predators.

On top of that, copperbellies will also use uplands that surround these wetlands – primarily forested habitat is what they're looking for – they use these uplands as movement corridors as they go from one wetland to another. And they may also use these uplands in July and August when it's quite hot out for shade and cover, and also as other areas to hunt if other wetlands are dry. This is one of the unique things about copperbellies, is that they move from one wetland to another much more frequently than some of our other water snake species, such as the more common northern water snake.

MS. LEON: So, what led to this species' threatened status?

MS. HOSLER: Primarily the loss and fragmentation of habitats. Not only have we lost wetlands, but all the forested matrix that surrounds these wetlands in this particular area of the three states where the northern population occurs. Because of their movement, they rely on these connections between the wetlands. So fragmentation can also really affect the copperbelly.

MS. LEON: Would you tell us about the conservations actions that are currently under way? Do they benefit any other species in the area?

MS. HOSLER: We have a pretty strong effort going on for habitat restoration, both on private and public lands in that area. That includes restoring wetlands as well as reforesting the area around these wetlands. We also have a monitoring effort underway right now to try to get a better handle on the population status of the northern population of copperbellies, which we think is in the low hundreds, which is really a pretty small population. And then a third element is, we are supporting research right now into the effect of roads on copperbellies. Specifically, we're looking at how the presence of roads might influence copperbellies behavior, and whether or not roads may act as a barrier to copperbelly movement.

MS. LEON: Are there any other agencies or organizations involved in the effort to recover this snake?

MS. HOSLER: Certainly. The three states where the northern population occurs, Ohio, Michigan, and Indiana, are vital partners in copperbelly conservation. The Departments of Natural Resources in those three states and even in Ohio, the Division of Wildlife—one of the wildlife areas supports the population of copperbellies. We also work with conservation organizations such as The Nature Conservancy and the Michigan Nature Association. And then some of our Federal partners include the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program that does restoration work for private landowners, and the Natural Resources Conservation Service – also works with

private landowners through the Wetland Reserve Program and the Healthy Forest Reserve program to also support copperbelly habitats.

MS. LEON: Having worked with this species, what would you say is the greatest challenge to its recovery?

MS. HOSLER: Probably our greatest challenge is working at the landscape level that's necessary to really provide the suitable habitat matrix that the copperbelly needs. Because it needs multiple wetlands, because it needs forested areas connecting all these wetlands, we have to work with quite a number of landowners. And so we have to really work just to get the word out about the copperbelly and about all the programs that are available for private landowners to take advantage of to restore wildlife habitat on their land.

MS. LEON: For our listeners who are maybe wondering what's so special about this snake, what would you tell them? Why do we care about the survival of this species?

MS. HOSLER: Well, the copperbelly is an important link in the food web of these wetland communities. It's really a valued part of our national heritage here in the Midwest. A landscape that can support copperbellies will benefit many other wildlife species as well.

MS. LEON: Thank you so much, Barbara, for taking the time to tell us more about the copperbelly water snake. It was a real pleasure having you on today.

MS. HOSLER: You're welcome, thank you.

MS. LEON: For the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, this is Sarah Leon. Thanks for listening.