threehorn wartyback

Obliquaria reflexa

Kingdom:	Animalia
Division/Phylum:	Mollusca
Class:	Bivalvia

Features

The threehorn wartyback mussel shell usually is small, rounded, moderately thick, and “inflated.” The anterior end is rounded and the posterior is bluntly pointed. Three or four large knobs are arranged in a row between the umbo (hump near the hinge) and the middle of the ventral margin. There often is a broad depression between knobs. The knobs are in alternating positions on either half of the shell. The color of the outside of the shell varies greatly – from light yellowish brown to green and dark brown. The shell usually is covered with numerous fine, dark green broken rays. The inside of the shell is pearly white. The threehorn wartyback may reach three inches long.

Natural History

The threehorn wartyback is found in large rivers in sand or gravel. It also may be found in river impoundments. Freshwater mussel distribution in Iowa is not well documented. They have an elaborate reproductive system. During spawning, males release sperm into the water. The sperm are drawn inside the female's shell, where they fertilize eggs in her body. The fertilized eggs develop into larvae (glochidia) and are stored for a time in the female's gills. When the glochidia mature, the female generally expels them into the water where they must attach as parasites to the gills or fins of fish. Larvae remain on the host fish for a period of weeks or months. Young mussels then detach from their host and drop to the bottom of the body of water. Hosts for this mussel are not known. Mussels are filter-feeders, bringing in water and the organic matter it contains through the incurrent siphon, filtering the particles out, then sending the rest of the water away from the body through the excurrent siphon. Particles filtered include plankton and detritus. Mature mussels spend most of their lives, which range from 10 to 100 years, partially or wholly buried in the bottom substrate.

Habitats

interior rivers and streams; Mississippi River; constructed lakes, ponds and reservoirs

Iowa Status

common; native

Iowa Range

Mississippi River and lower reaches of its large tributaries

Bibliography

Iowa Department of Natural Resources. 2001. *Biodiversity of Iowa: Aquatic Habitats* CD-ROM.