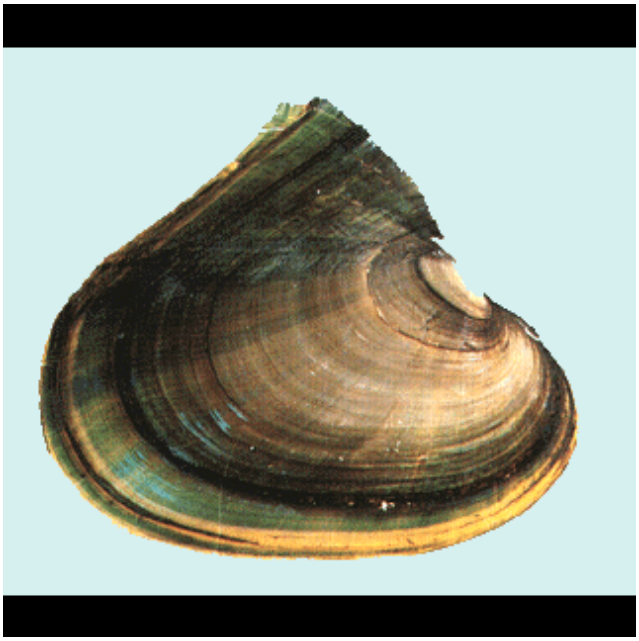

pink heelsplitter

Potamilus alatus

Kingdom:	Animalia
Division/Phylum:	Mollusca
Class:	Bivalvia

Features

The shell of the pink heelsplitter mussel is large, elongate, laterally compressed, and somewhat rectangular. The shells of younger individuals are thin, but older shells are moderately thick. The anterior end is rounded and the posterior is bluntly squared. A large “wing” is present behind the umbo (hump near the hinge). The outside of the shell is smooth and dark green or brown. Older shells are black. The inside of the shell is purple or pinkish purple (rarely white) and highly iridescent. The pink heelsplitter may reach lengths up to eight inches.

Natural History

The pink heelsplitter is found in medium to large rivers or lakes in mud or mixed mud, sand, and gravel. It is not reported from northwestern Iowa, but it is found in the Missouri River upstream of the Iowa border. 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. The only reported host for this mussel is the freshwater drum. 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

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

Iowa Status

common; native

Iowa Range

southeastern Iowa and the Mississippi River

Bibliography

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