washboard

Megalonaias nervosa

Kingdom:	Animalia
Division/Phylum:	Mollusca
Class:	Bivalvia

Features

The washboard mussel has a large, dark, thick, heavy shell with v-shaped ridges in the front and large folds on the sides and back. The anterior end of the shell is rounded and the posterior is squared. The inside of the shell is white, sometimes with purple or rust-colored blotches. The washboard may grow to 11 inches long.

Natural History

The washboard lives in large rivers that have a good current. Sometimes it is found in medium-size streams that have a mud, sand, or gravel bottom. Washboard shells are harvested to produce cultured pearls. 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 include 16 species of fish. 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

Iowa Status

uncommon; native

Iowa Range

Mississippi River

Bibliography

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