



MOLLUSKS AND CRUSTACEANS

DWARF WEDGE MUSSEL

ABOUT

The Dwarf Wedge Mussel (*Alasmidonta heterodon*) is a small freshwater mussel. They rarely grow bigger than 1.5 inches (38mm) in length and are brownish or yellowish brown in color. Adult mussels filter their food, feeding on algae and other small floating particles. Once settled they rarely move, spending most of their time buried in the bottom of streams and rivers. They like slow to moderate running water over cobble, fine gravel, firm silt or sandy bottoms. They can also be found amongst submerged aquatic plants, near stream banks, or underneath overhanging tree limbs. Adult Dwarf Wedge Mussels are sexually dimorphic (having both female and male individuals) and males release sperm into the water during mid-summer or fall. Females collect the sperm while siphoning water for food, and the eggs are fertilized and held within the female until their release the following spring. At release, the eggs have developed into parasitic larvae (glochidia), which attach themselves to fish with a small hook-like appendage. After several weeks attached to the fish the glochidia detaches and drops to the river bottom, becoming a juvenile young mussel.

DID YOU KNOW?

The Dwarf Wedge Mussel, which lives for about 10 years, is found at 17 sites in seven Atlantic Coast watercourses running through New Hampshire, Vermont, Connecticut, New York, Maryland, Virginia, and North Carolina. Its numbers have declined drastically and most remaining populations are only in the 100s, so it is critically endangered. Contributing factors to this species' severe decline are water pollution by sediments, chemicals from agriculture and other developments like golf courses, and loss of habitat. Most mussels live for upwards of 20, 30 or even 100 years, so because of the relatively short lifespan of the Dwarf Wedge mussel, adults must be constantly replaced to maintain viable numbers.

For more detailed information visit: www.dec.ny.gov or www.natureserve.org.

TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE

What is the approximate life span of a Dwarf Wedge Mussel?

- a) 17 years
- b) 10 years
- c) 30 years
- d) 100 years

Answer is B.

