Giant Floater

Anodonta grandis





Giant floaters are freshwater mussels, or *bivalves* (invertebrates with two shells) that live on the bottom of freshwater streams, rivers, lakes and ponds. As one of more than 50 species of freshwater mussels found in Texas, giant floaters are very widespread.



APPEARANCE

Shell length: (from anterior to posterior ends) up to 6 inches (17 cm)

Distinguishing Characteristics

- Outside color of shell varies from tan to light brown, greenish-brown and dark brown.
- Inside color is pearly white, with a bluish, light pink or salmon tint.
- Concentric growth lines on outside of smooth shell
- Toothless hinge
- Prominent beak (raised area near the hinge)

LIFE HISTORY

Range:	Widespread across North America. In
hangei	Toyas, giant floators occur in all major
	river drainage basins
Dist	Tive qualitage basilis.
Diet:	liny aquatic plants and animals
Predators:	Raccoons, turtles, water birds and fish
	species such as freshwater drum
Sexual maturity:	Not known
Spawning season:	From August to April or May
Eggs:	Number varies depending on age and
	habitat conditions. Males release sperm
	directly into the water. Females take the
	sperm in through their siphons.
Incubation:	Eggs located on a female's gills are
	fertilized and develop in a brood pouch
	until large enough to be released into
	the water.
Young:	The free-floating larval stage of develop-
	ment is called the <i>glochidia</i> stage.
	When the glochidia come in contact
	with a particular fish species such as
	longnose gar, redfin shiners, or common
	carp, they attach to the gills of the fish
	and live as parasites for several months
	without harming the fish. When large
	enough, the juveniles drop off of the fish
	host, find a good place to dig in and
	begin growing into adult mussels
Life span	Four to ten years



HABITAT

Giant floaters settle in slow-moving steams or rivers and large ponds or lakes with a muddy or somewhat sandy bottom.

BEHAVIOR

Giant floaters are *filter feeders* (eat tiny plants and animals that they filter out of the water taken in through their siphons). Although they remain fairly stationary, partly buried in the muddy or sandy bottoms of quiet streams and ponds, some biologists speculate that giant floaters can generate gasses or trap air bubbles inside their shells and float from one location to another.

NOW YOU KNOW!

- Giant floaters have thin shells. Even large specimens are light weight.
- Some scientists speculate that mussel glochidia, which live as parasites on fish hosts, actually keep the fish from getting other more harmful parasites.
- Freshwater mussels are often the first species to vanish when environmental conditions change or decline. Drought, floods, or pollutants can have an immediate and sometimes longlasting effect on mussel populations. Finding healthy mussel populations can mean a healthy aquatic environment for people and animals.

GIANT FLOATERS AND PEOPLE

As filter feeders, giant floaters will concentrate in their tissues anything dissolved in the water, including chemicals, heavy metals and other contaminants. Scientists can examine mussel tissue to check for many toxic chemical pollutants that are harmful to aquatic habitats and to people.

Humans have harvested giant floaters and other freshwater mussels to use as fish bait.

PWD LF D0200-848X (8/02) NOTICE: Texas Parks and Wildlife Department receives federal financial assistance from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Under Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, the Age Discrimination Act of 1975, and Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972, the U.S. Department of the Interior and its bureaus prohibit discrimination on the basis of race, color, national origin, age, disability or sex (in educational programs). If you believe that you have been discriminated against in any Texas Parks and Wildlife Department program, activity, or if you desire further information, please call or write: The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Office for Diversity and Civil Rights Programs - External Programs, 4040 N. Fairfax Drive, Webb 300, Arlington, VA 22203, (703) 338-1724.