

APALACHICOLA FLOATER

Utterbackiana heardi



Order: Unionoida

Family: Unionidae

FNAI Ranks: G2/S1S2

U.S. Status: none

FL Status: none

Description: A medium-large bivalve mollusk reaching a length of 4.4 in. (113 mm). Valves (shell) yellowish olive to light brown, sometimes with dark olive to brown concentric bands; smooth, except slightly roughened posteriorly; oval and very inflated (deep); umbos (raised areas on valves near hinge) near middle of shell, and in large individuals extending above hinge line and bearing simple, sculptured loops. Valves lack internal teeth; nacre (inner lining of valves) white with some pinkish to purplish color.

Similar Species: Combination of color, shape, size, and great inflation of the shell distinguish this species from most other Florida mussels. Distinguished from *Utterbackia imbecilis* and *U. peggyae* by heavier shell, more convex ventral edge, and umbos that extend just above hinge. *A. couperiana* is more flattened posteriorly. Because many mussels are similar externally, identity should always be confirmed by an expert.

Habitat: River floodplain waters with little or no current, such as floodplain lakes and backwaters with muddy substrates.

Seasonal Occurrence: Present year-round.

Florida Distribution: Based on current information, the species' state range is restricted to the Apalachicola and Ochlockonee river drainages of northern (panhandle) Florida. According to Brim Box and Williams (2000), it is suspected to occur parapatrically with *Anodonta couperiana* (peninsular Florida) and *A. suborbiculata* (Florida panhandle).

Range-wide Distribution: Apalachicola River system; status uncertain in Alabama and Georgia, where shells but no live animals have been found in tributaries of Chattahoochee and Flint rivers.

Conservation Status: Much of Apalachicola River floodplain is publicly owned, but river still faces multiple threats, including channel dredging and the exotic Asian clam (*Corbicula fluminea*).

Protection and Management: The major focuses in managing for viable populations of freshwater mussels are maintenance of high quality waters and benthic habitats, as well as ample stream and river flows (damming is strongly discouraged). Valuable tools include establishment of buffers and streamside management zones for all agricultural, silvicultural, mining, and developmental activities; and elimination or reduction of invasive species (especially other bivalves) if possible. Monitoring programs should focus on water and benthic habitat quality, as well as population sizes and population statuses of both mussels and their host fishes at all occupied sites. Additionally, it is important to promote responsible watershed land use practices by implementing aquatic habitat education programs for land use planners and resource managers, and to conduct periodic reevaluations of the effectiveness of habitat protection measures and watershed land use practices. Monitor and attempt to control Asiatic clam. Limit withdrawal of surface and subterranean waters as necessary to maintain normal stream flows, especially during drought. Use silt fencing and vegetation to control runoff and siltation at all stream crossings, especially during construction and maintenance. Avoid introduction of non-native invertebrates, especially zebra mussel (*Dreissena polymorpha*). Use and maintain sewer systems rather than septic tanks and stream-dumping for management of wastewater. Identify and maintain fish populations that serve as mussel larval hosts.

References: Brim Box and Williams 2000, Deyrup and Franz (eds.) 1994, Gordon and Hoeh 1993.

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