



Photo: Mike Gangloff, Bugwood.org



New Zealand Mud Snail



A New Zealand mud snail is very small. Photo: Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife.



Many New Zealand mud snails can fit inside a penny. Photo: Mohammed El Damir, Bugwood.org.

What Is It?

The New Zealand mud snail (*Potamopyrgus antipodarum*) is a tiny (less than six millimeters) aquatic snail that is adaptable to diverse climates and environmental conditions. It is found in freshwater and brackish environments.

Is It Here Yet?

Yes. The New Zealand mud snail was first discovered in the lower Columbia River in 2002 and in Olympia's Capitol Lake in 2009. Other known locations are on the Long Beach peninsula and in King County's Lake Washington and Kelsey and Thornton Creeks.

Why Should I Care?

The New Zealand mud snail is considered a high threat to freshwater and brackish water environments. It can dominate river and lakebed habitat by achieving densities of more than 100,000 per square meter. It out-competes native aquatic snails and insects that other species depend on for food. Disruption of the food chain can lead to reduced growth rates and lower populations of fish.

What Are Its Characteristics?

- The New Zealand mud snail can have 5 or 6 whorls and generally is light to dark brown, but can appear black in color, especially when wet.
- Adults are 4-6 millimeters long.

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- Generally self-reproducing by cloning. A single snail can reproduce rapidly and colonize a new area.
- The opening of the shell has a movable cover called the operculum that allows the snail to seal itself inside, which protects it from short-term exposure to chemicals. It can survive out of water for weeks in damp, cool conditions, and it can pass through the digestive tracts of fish and birds unharmed.
- It can tolerate a wide range of habitats, including brackish water, and many different substrates such as rock, gravel, sand, and mud.
- It is a nighttime grazer, feeding on plant and animal detritus, algae, sediments, and diatoms.

How Do I Distinguish It From Native Species?

Several species of native freshwater and estuarine snails may be confused with the New Zealand mud snail because of their small size. A powerful magnifying loop or microscope may be needed to positively identify it.



Multiple New Zealand mud snails can fit in a human hand. Photo: Robyn Draheim, Flickr.

How Can We Stop It?

- Clean, drain, and dry any watercraft after use—this prevents hitchhiking of any aquatic invasive species, including fish and shellfish diseases. Find more information here: <https://invasivespecies.wa.gov/campaigns/clean-drain-dry/>
- Thoroughly brush off any debris from waders, boots, and equipment that came in contact with stream or lake water, then wash the gear in hot water (140 degrees Fahrenheit), or freeze the gear overnight.

What Should I Do If I Find One?

Report immediately via the WA Invasives mobile app or reporting web form at <https://invasivespecies.wa.gov/report-a-sighting/>.