

Species Alert – Asian Clam, a new invasive species in Ireland

Invasive Species Ireland and the National Biodiversity Data Centre recently received reports of a new species of clam in Ireland. Commonly known as Asian clam (the scientific name is *Corbicula fluminea*), this freshwater clam is one of Ireland's Most Unwanted invasive species and scientists are now concerned that we will see this species spread to many more river systems across Ireland.

Where and when?

The Asian clam was discovered in the River Barrow near St. Mullins by Pascal Sweeney on the 13th of April and within two days Dr. Evelyn Moorkens had verified its identity. A Species Alert was issued and earlier this week staff from the Central Fisheries Board surveyed the site and found that the species is well established in the area.



What are the likely impacts?

Where this species has invaded freshwater habitats outside of Ireland, it has grown to very high densities. This species is known to threaten other species of freshwater invertebrates by outcompeting them for space and food. In Ireland, Asian clams could impact on the food webs of our native species, changing both plant and animal communities. These changes could have knock effects on our native fish species as the clams can quickly cover the favoured gravely spawning grounds with sedimentation.

Scientists are concerned that this species will have similar impacts to the already widely established zebra mussel (scientific name is *Dreissena polymorpha*). During a risk assessment of invasive species that pose a threat to Ireland, the Invasive Species Ireland project ranked this species as one of Ireland's Most Unwanted species. John Kelly from Invasive Species Ireland said that "*the Asian clams have the potential to cause both economic and ecological impacts in Ireland*".

Asian clams have been introduced in North America, South America and it is widely distributed across many European countries. It is not yet certain how this species arrived in Ireland but this species is used in aquaria and ponds and may have been released by accident into the wild.

So what can be done about the threat of invasive species?

"*We all have our part to play in protecting Ireland's economy and unique biodiversity*" says Colette O'Flynn from the National Biodiversity Data Centre. People with garden ponds and aquaria should not dump unwanted material in any stream, river or lake. If you can, compost the material at home or else send it to your local landfill site where they can deal with garden waste in an environmentally friendly way.

To see what invasive species we have in Ireland and if any are in your area visit the National Invasive Species Database website <http://invasives.biodiversityireland.ie>.

If you have seen the Asian clam or any of the other listed invasive species please submit that information through the National Invasive Species Database website or the Invasive Species Ireland website www.invasivespeciesireland.ie If possible provide a photo and do not take the clam from the waterway as you may unknowingly be removing a native species.

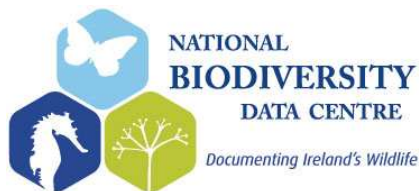
Notes to Editor:

The **National Invasive Species Database** provides up-to-date centralised information on the distribution of invasive species in Ireland. It answers the questions: What invasive species do we have in Ireland? Where exactly are they? The database has been developed as a resource to assist recording, monitoring and surveillance programmes, and provides the infrastructure for development of an early warning system for invasive species.

The associated website: <http://invasives.biodiversityireland.ie> is a portal to the searchable database that is linked to interactive GIS distribution maps with full record information on invasive species sightings. The website also contains Species Alerts that are issued when confirmed sightings of potentially invasive species arrive in Ireland, database up-dates, an Invasive Species Survey where people are urged to report sightings of eight of Ireland's most unwanted invasive plants and record submission facility.

The National Invasive Species Database is joint funded by The Heritage Council and The Environmental Protection Agency and was established by the National Biodiversity Data Centre in 2008.

For more information contact the National Invasive Species Database Manager Colette O' Flynn e-mail: coflynn@biodiversityireland.ie or phone: 051 306240.



The **Invasive Species Ireland** project is a joint venture between the Northern Ireland Environment Agency and the National Parks and Wildlife Service.

The Invasive Species Ireland project aims to substantially reduce the impact of invasive species on Irish biodiversity, to contribute to halting the biodiversity loss by 2010 and beyond; and to minimise economic and social costs caused by invasive species.

Through partnership working, the vision for Invasive Species Ireland is that the island of Ireland will have a high performing system for managing invasive species risks to the economy, environment and human health. The project is working with stakeholders, partners, and the people of Ireland and Northern Ireland to develop an understanding of, and confidence in the systems required to achieve effective prevention and management of invasive species.

For more information on the Invasive Species Ireland project see www.invasivespeciesireland.com

Photo credit: Asian Clam (Colette O' Flynn)