

Robust Redhorse Fact Sheet

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The Mystery Fish

The robust redhorse (*Moxostoma robustum*) is a large, long-lived member of the redhorse sucker family. Adults can reach 31 inches in length and weigh up to 18 pounds, although the average length in sample populations is 25 inches and the average weight is 9 pounds. The maximum known age is 27 years. The fish has a thick, robust body with rose-colored fins and a fleshy lower lip.

The robust redhorse was discovered in the Yadkin River North Carolina and first described by Edward Cope in 1869. Yet the fish remained a mystery, unknown to scientists until individuals were captured in the Oconee River, Georgia in 1991. Historically, the robust redhorse occurred in large Atlantic Slope rivers from the Altamaha River drainage in Georgia to the Pee Dee River drainage in North and South Carolina. Wild populations exist in the Ocmulgee and Oconee rivers (Georgia), the Savannah River (Georgia and South Carolina), and the Pee Dee River drainage (North and South Carolina). Successful stocking in the Broad and Ogeechee rivers in Georgia and the Broad and Wateree rivers of South Carolina has re-established historical populations.

Robust Redhorse Conservation Committee

The Robust Redhorse Conservation Committee (RRCC) was created in 1995 to improve the status of the species throughout its former range. The RRCC is a cooperative, voluntary partnership formed under a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between state and federal resource agencies, private industry, and the conservation community. Current RRCC members include:

GA Department of Natural Resources
NC Wildlife Resources Commission
SC Department of Natural Resources
US Fish and Wildlife Service
US Geological Survey
US Forest Service

Duke Power Company
Georgia Power Company
Georgia Wildlife Federation
South Carolina Aquarium
South Carolina Electric and Gas Company

In addition to the signatory members, the Georgia River Network, North Carolina Museum of Natural History and Santee Cooper Power are cooperating members. Many university research facilities participate as affiliate members.

Threats to the Species

Much has been learned about the fish since its discovery, but many questions about its habitat, life history, and survival threats remain. The robust redhorse is difficult to sample and may be easily overlooked or misidentified as a closely-related or more common fish. Non-spawning adults prefer deep, moderately swift areas of the river, often near woody debris. Spawning occurs over clean, shallow gravel deposits in swift current. Adults crush shells with molariform pharyngeal teeth and feed on bivalves including the invasive, exotic Asiatic clam (*Corbicula*).

Threats to the species may include:

- Limited population ranges;
- Low rate of recruitment to populations;
- Predation from the non-native flathead and blue catfish;
- Reduced habitat quality due to erosion and sedimentation from land disturbances; and
- Habitat loss and disruption of spawning migrations resulting from impoundments and dams.

Partnership Accomplishments

The RRCC is currently facilitating recovery efforts and conservation measures by conducting research to answer scientific questions and address management needs including:

- Habitat use and movement;
- Early life history, population dynamics and genetics research;
- Discovery of additional populations, supplemental stocking of existing populations, and re-establishment of historical populations; and
- Public education.

In addition, the RRCC adopted a Conservation Strategy to establish short- and long-term conservation goals and management actions, and has developed Policies to describe the current understanding of the robust redhorse and the processes under which the partnership operates.

If you believe you have seen or captured a robust redhorse or want more information, contact:

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