



RARE MUSSEL FIND IN THE NORTHERN CAPE PROVINCE!

26th June 2014

Start

During a recent Cape Critical Rivers survey of the Endangered Clanwilliam Sandfish in the Northern Cape's Oorlogskloof Nature Reserve, live specimens of the fresh water mussel *Unio caffer* were discovered in the Reserve for the first time. This record is also only the second recording of live mussels in the entire Northern Cape Province.

Team members from the Cape Critical Rivers Project, a partnership between the Endangered Wildlife Trust (EWT), the Department of Environment and Nature Conservation (DENC), CapeNature and the Freshwater Research Centre (FRC), were netting and measuring fish when Bonnie Schumann, the EWT's Drylands Conservation Programme's (EWT-DCP) Senior Field Officer, was thrilled to extract the first live mussel nestling in the gravelly riverbed.

Ms Schumann explains, "What made me stop mid-fish-count and go off with a digging stick was I happened to look down and there alongside me were the remains of a fairly recent meal in the form of an opened mussel with bits of stringy meat on it! Otter-left-overs unexpectedly provided sure proof there were mussels in that pool!"

These mussels have shown a sharp decline in numbers and distribution in recent years, and as a result are listed as Near Threatened by the IUCN, highlighting the conservation importance of the Oorlogskloof Nature Reserve as a sanctuary, not only for endangered fish species and Bokkeveld Sandstone Fynbos, but also for freshwater mussels. Across the rest of the mussel's range pollution, siltation, water abstraction and a decline in water quality are all thought to be contributing to the decline of this species. Fresh water mussels are considered to be an indicator of the condition of the fresh water systems they inhabit as they are sensitive to negative changes in these systems.

Initial identification of the species was done by Dr Helen James from Rhodes University and Professor Corrie Wolmarans from North West University. Dr Ruhan Slabbert from the Stellenbosch University confirmed the identification of the species by DNA sequencing. Voucher specimens of the mussels have been lodged in the National Freshwater Snail Collection and in the Albany Museum collection where they will be available for future research.

The Cape Critical River Project partnership, made possible through IUCN SOS funding and the Elizabeth Wakeman Henderson Foundation, is responding to the challenges facing our fresh water ecosystems and is implementing actions to protect critically important fresh water ecosystems in the

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The Endangered Wildlife Trust is a non-profit, public benefit organisation dedicated to conserving species and ecosystems in southern Africa to the benefit of all people.

NPO Number: 015-502, **PBO number:** 930 001 777, **Member of IUCN** - The International Union for Conservation of Nature
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Cape Floristic Region. The Oorlogskloof River is a priority river due to the presence of several endangered indigenous fish species, most notably the Endangered Clanwilliam Sandfish *Labeoseberis*. Management actions already being implemented along the Oorlogskloof River to conserve this valuable catchment will also benefit the newly discovered mussels. For further information about the Cape Critical River Project please contact Christy Bragg on christyb@ewt.org.za

Anybody sighting fresh water mussels shells in the Northern Cape can report these to the Mandy Schumann from the Oorlogskloof Nature Reserve at bokkeveld@gmail.com or on 027 2181159. Sightings in the Western Cape can be reported to Martine Jordaan from CapeNature at mjordaan@capenature.co.za

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