

News Release



New York's thumbnail-sized snail coaxed into captive reproduction

Try saying this 8 times fast: Chittenango ovate amber snail. Found only in the Empire State and called the 'Chit' by its followers, this snail has recently achieved a step crucial to its recovery, captive breeding. In collaboration with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and other partners, a State University of New York graduate student has established a population inside of the College of Environmental Science and Forestry.

The snail survives exclusively alongside a single central New York waterfall. Biologists have feared that a single catastrophic event could wipe out the entire population.

To address this threat, graduate student Cody Gilbertson has worked to establish a captive breeding population in her lab at SUNY-ESF in Syracuse, New York. Since early June, the captive snails have laid around 500 eggs, with about 260 hatching thus far.

"It has been important for us to understand what the Chittenango ovate amber snail needs for long-term survival," Gilbertson said. "We have studied their habitat and simulated the conditions in the lab for an optimal rearing environment. This backup population can supplement their wild population and prevent extinction in the case that an unplanned event such as a storm, rockslide, or drought eliminates the population."

Gilbertson's work is part of an ongoing collaboration between the USFWS, the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation, Rosamond Gifford Zoo, Seneca Park Zoo, the New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation, and SUNY-ESF to protect the snail.

"The work being done through this project is greatly refining our understanding of how this animal lives and what its needs are for successful management of its habitat," said DEC Wildlife Biologist Kathleen O'Brien. "This may be important not only for the COAS in New York but for preservation of other rare species of snails in trouble across the globe."

Every year, these partners gather with volunteers to monitor the population. Estimated population size fell in 2006 after a rockslide occurred in their habitat. These efforts will hopefully boost the population. The snails thrive in the spray zone of the waterfall, a moist and mild environment, and they feed on microscopic plants growing on nearby rocks and vegetation. The species is named for its home; its ovate, egg-shaped shell; and its amber coloring.

"We've been working towards this since writing a revised recovery plan in 2006. This is a very exciting step in Chittenango ovate amber snail conservation" says Robyn Niver, USFWS endangered species biologist.

For further information about the COAS and efforts to protect it please visit <http://www.fws.gov/northeast/nyfo/es/coas.htm>

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