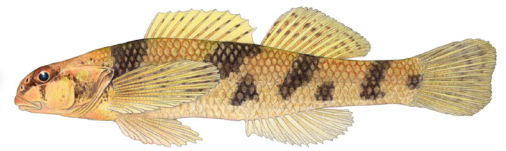


The Search for the Maryland Darter



The search is on for the Maryland darter, a federally-endangered fish that has not been seen for over 20 years and is feared extinct. Biologists from Frostburg State University, Marshall University in West Virginia, and the Maryland Department of Natural Resources (MDNR) have teamed up to determine once and for all if this rare species still swims in Maryland waters. In 2009 and 2010, they will be surveying the waters of the Susquehanna River between Conowingo Dam and Havre de Grace and three Harford County streams for this exceedingly rare species.



Maryland darters may swim undetected on the bottom of the large Susquehanna River between Conowingo Dam and Havre de Grace, Maryland. Biologists from MDNR, Frostburg State University, and Marshall University will survey the river for this rare species in 2009 and 2010.

Does the Maryland darter still exist?

Since 1988, regional ichthyologists and fish enthusiasts have made many valiant, but futile attempts to find this species leading many to believe that the Maryland darter has joined the long and growing list of recent extinctions. However, the Maryland darter has feigned extinction in the past. Following nearly 50 years of unsuccessful attempts to collect Maryland darter from Swan Creek where it was first discovered in 1912, biologists declared it extinct in 1959. It was “re-discovered” in nearby Gasheys Creek five years later and in Deer Creek in 1965.

Biologists have long suspected that it could be hiding out in the deep, murky waters of the Susquehanna River, an area that has been historically difficult to survey for small, bottom-dwelling fishes like the Maryland darter. For the latest effort, biologists will drag an electrified trawl, a smaller version of what is used by commercial fishermen in the ocean, across the bottom of the river in the hopes of stirring up unsuspecting darters. Although never used before in Maryland’s portion of the Susquehanna River, trawls have been used in other U.S. rivers and have proven effective at collecting rare darter species. Armed with this promising new fishing gear, biologists are hoping to determine the fate of Maryland’s namesake fish. Information collected during these surveys will be used to update the federal listing status of this endangered species.

What is the Maryland darter?

The Maryland darter is one the rarest fishes in the world and is only known from Swan, Gasheys, and Deer creeks in Harford County, Maryland. It is a small bottom-dwelling species related to yellow perch and walleye. Unlike these other fishes, adult Maryland darters are small; reaching a maximum size of just under 3 inches on a diet comprised of small insects and snails. It was last seen in 1988 in Deer Creek. For more information on Maryland darters and why it is an important species visit <http://www.dnr.state.md.us/wildlife/mddarter.asp>



Biologists pull an electrified trawl at the mouth of Deer Creek in November 2009. This trawl has been designed to catch bottom-dwelling fishes and will be used to search for the rare Maryland darter.

