

Delight at discovery of pearl mussels in new Scottish site

Critically endangered molluscs to be safeguarded from poachers

MARTIN WILLIAMS

TWO previously unknown populations of the endangered freshwater pearl mussel have been found in the north of Scotland during conservation survey work.

The find on the national forest estate consists of two groups of mussels – one estimated to contain 50 and the other at least 1100.

Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) said: "This is an extremely exciting find as this species is rare and under threat in the UK. Scotland is the stronghold of the UK population."

The discovery came as the Forestry Commission carried out a survey on a river in Sutherland as part of an SNH project aimed at safeguarding the mussels.

SNH said the discovery was made several miles away from the nearest known population of the mussel. The exact location is being kept secret to protect the new population from poachers.

Freshwater pearl mussels are fully protected under Schedule 5 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, and while the pearls that the mussels can produce have long been used in jewellery, their exploitation is now strictly prohibited.



RARE: Illegal poaching and water pollution pose a threat to the creatures.

Conservationists say the mussel, which can live for more than 100 years, is one of the most critically endangered molluscs in the world, and illegal poaching and pollution issues in Scotland are threatening its future.

Up to half of the world's remain-

ing population are believed to be found in Angus, the Cairngorms and the north west of Scotland.

The project will work with the police and fishery owners to implement "riverwatch" schemes to help prevent the illegal persecution of pearl mussels.

These schemes can also help reduce illegal salmon poaching.

Jackie Webley of (SNH) which is overseeing the Pearls in Peril protection initiative, said: "This is a rare find and we are delighted that it has been made."

"We are obviously keeping the location under wraps as too many pearl mussel populations have been decimated by illegal fishing or illegal and substandard construction or river works."

"The freshwater pearl mussel has suffered a catastrophic decline across its former range and it is important as it is an excellent indicator of good water quality, and we all need good quality drinking water for fishing and other leisure pursuits that are worth millions to the Scottish economy."

Buglife, the invertebrate conservation trust, says all but one of the remaining colonies are considered small and vulnerable and that despite full legal protection they continue to be threatened.

The rivers of the Highlands and the north-east hold the largest populations of the mussel in the UK, but they have been vanishing at a rate of two rivers a year since 1970.

Since 1998 illegal pearl fishing and disturbance of their habitat has played the largest part in their decline, Buglife says.

There are now thought to be only 61 breeding sites left. If the present rate of decline continues, it is estimated that surviving Scottish populations may only last for another 25 years.

Wedding favour: artist seeks photographs of marriages in city

PHIL MILLER
ARTS CORRESPONDENT

AN award-winning artist creating a film about the history of immigration in Glasgow to accompany the Commonwealth Games is asking residents to send him their wedding photographs.

As part of the cultural celebrations of the Commonwealth Games next year, the Turner Prize-nominated film artist Phil Collins wants to gather as many images of weddings, engagements and commitment ceremonies as possible in the coming months. His new work will take the structure of a "day in the life" of the city.

Collins, whose father was

"It's about looking for an inclusive idea of what makes Glasgow. The site of Queen's Park, and what surrounds it, is really interesting – you have the Vicky [Victoria Infirmary], Pollokshields with its Pakistani Glaswegian community, you have Govanhill nearby, so you have a lot of people near a public space which has a history all of its own."

Collins said he wants Glaswegians who have an "amazing story to tell" to get in contact with him so he can consider them for his film.

He said wedding photographs are not only images of personal relationships but also display history, fashion and social changes

