

Chautauqua Watershed Notes
From the Chautauqua Watershed Conservancy
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Giant Snails found in the Lake

By Jeff Tome

For the Chautauqua Watershed Conservancy



Jamestown Audubon naturalist Jeff Tome holds a Japanese Trapdoor Snail, a recent addition to the list of exotic species living in Chautauqua Lake.

What's big and black, hides behind a trap door and now lives in Chautauqua Lake? If you guessed the Japanese Trapdoor Snail, then you get a big prize! If not, you are not alone. I had never heard of these monstrous snails until we dragged one out of the lake while preparing for a program on what lives in the lake.

Three of the huge snails were dragged out of the weeds around McCrea's Point, but hundreds of babies smaller than peas were feeding on the weeds. For the first time since I started doing lake programs ten years ago, there were no native snails to be found.

Japanese Trapdoor Snails are sold for garden ponds, where they eat the dead leaves, algae and muck that tends to accumulate. They give live birth twice a year or so to somewhere between ten to 120 babies at a time and grow to be over three inches long.

A quick hunt on the Internet reveals that it is advertised as a non-invasive species that doesn't spread quickly. This is mostly because it does not lay hundreds of eggs at a time like other snails do.

Japanese Trapdoor Snails were first introduced in the 1940s to Lake Erie around Sandusky, Ohio. They were supposed to make great food for the Channel Catfish of the region. Since then, one haul with a seine net can pull up two tons of these snails. According to the United States Geological Survey (USGS), the snail is not found outside the Lake Erie Watershed. They were once found only in Japan, Taiwan and Korea, where they are common in rice paddies. They were also brought into the West Coast for the food market, since many people eat this type of snail.

How did these snails get into Chautauqua Lake? We may never know. They could have arrived attached to the hull of a boat that had been transported from Lake Erie to Chautauqua Lake. They could have been released when someone cleaned out their

garden pond. Someone may have released them deliberately, thinking they would eat the nuisance weeds in the lake.

However the thing got in the lake, we have to deal with it now. It's not listed as an invasive species in any database that I could find, but it will survive the winter in the lake. For now, it looks like we have an exotic new resident in the lake. I just hope that this new resident doesn't cause problems.

If you would like to try and control them, I recommend the "Es Cargo" solution. Go ahead and find some of these giant snails and give them a warm new home. Perhaps with a little garlic butter, their new home could be you.

The Chautauqua Watershed Conservancy is a private, not-for-profit, 501(c)(3) organization with a mission to preserve and enhance the water quality, scenic beauty and ecological health of the lakes, streams and watersheds of the Chautauqua region. Its urgent focus is to conserve the endangered natural shore lands of Chautauqua Lake, which provide fish and wildlife habitat and pollution filtering functions essential to a healthy lake. Only four miles (10%) of the lake's shoreline remains in a natural, undeveloped condition. The Conservancy is funded primarily through membership donations. Its 2008 annual membership campaign is currently underway. It is presently raising funds to conserve the Chautauqua Lake's most important remaining natural shoreline habitats, undertake programs to address the root causes of the conditions that fuel lake plant growth, and manage its preserves. It is the only local organization conserving lands in perpetuity for these purposes. Please contact the Conservancy at 664-2166 to join for 2008!