

# Zebra mussel

*Dreissena polymorpha*

**Invasive: High impact**

## Species profile

- Habitat:** Freshwater. Slow moving rivers, canals, lakes, reservoirs.
- Distribution in Ireland:** Widespread and common throughout central Ireland, sparse elsewhere.
- Status:** Established.
- Family name:** Dreissenidae.
- Reproduction:** Female zebra mussels can release up to 1 million eggs a year.

## Identifying features

- Colour:** Yellow to green to brown in colour with darker diagonal stripes. Although this pattern can vary greatly, it will retain striped appearance even after death.
- Size:** 3-4cm in length.
- Attachment:** Zebra mussels attach themselves to hard surfaces via strong threads (byssus) unlike any other bivalve in Ireland.



Singular zebra mussel, showing colouring and striped pattern - Shutterstock



Colony of zebra mussels showing the variation of colours and striped patterns - Shutterstock



Zebra mussel  
© Roy Anderson



Colony of zebra mussels  
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## Threats

Decline of native mussel species as zebra mussels can colonise their shells and habitat.

Can cause changes in nutrient cycles and reduce levels of phytoplankton.

Biofouling of water pipes and other intake systems can cause serious problems (as the species can be colonial).

Due to their fast colonisation and ability for causing blockages, they can have an economic cost mostly attributed to removal.

## Similar species

- No other similar species in Ireland, but expert verification of sightings should be sought.



Zebra mussels can cover objects and cause blockages and damage - Shutterstock



Zebra mussel on native mussel  
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