

— Conservation status and a novel restoration of the endangered freshwater mussel —



Bivalves play an important part in freshwater ecosystems and improve water quality; the thick-shelled river mussel *Unio crassus* is classified as a bioindicator. Unfortunately, the species is regarded as endangered and is under species protection in the whole of Europe. The reasons for the drastic decline of its populations are: considerable eutrophication of waters, anthropogenic influence in its broad sense and the presence of invasive species. The life cycle of *U. crassus* includes the stage of larva which is an obligatory parasite of fish. This makes it possible for the species to disperse and populate new territories but it limits the development to places where appropriate host species are available. Intensive measures have been taken in Poland to protect *U. crassus*, while in France numerous new localities of the species have been bar-coded. In 2010–2014 active protection measures were taken in southern Poland, including inventorying, studies of genetic diversity and reintroductions. The project contributed to the increase in population abundance and in the number of localities of the thick-shelled river mussel, which resulted in a twofold

increase in the range of occurrence of the species in the river. The procedures presented here can and should be used in further restitution of *U. crassus* not only in Poland but also elsewhere in Europe.

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