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Coker, R. E.

The Common and Scientific names
of fresh-water mussels,



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DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE
BUREAU OF FISHERIES

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THE COMMON AND SCIENTIFIC NAMES OF FRESH-WATER MUSSELS.^a

It is a matter of general knowledge that the common names of mussels, like those of fish, are not fixed. Therefore, in recording definite information regarding the distribution or qualities of species it becomes necessary to use the scientific or Latin names, which correspond not only to explicit published descriptions of species, but also to type specimens located in museums. There are examples of shells which may seem intermediate and of doubtful identification, but the scientific name offers the nearest practicable approach to a positive nomenclature.

Should one write of the "bank-climbers," a reader familiar with common names as used on the Wabash River understands that reference is made to a shell of white nacre very similar to the yellow sand-shell but inferior in quality (*Lampsilis fallaciosa*); while one more familiar with the common names applied in Arkansas would think reference was made to a very different species having a purple nacre and regarded as worthless for purposes of manufacture (*Quadrula trapezoides*). It is unavoidable, therefore, that in its publications the Bureau should use the scientific names of unmistakable application, while it endeavors to couple with such names the appropriate common names.

On account of the direct commercial value of some 40 species of fresh-water mussels, there are many persons without scientific training who are yet interested in scientific papers dealing with their distribution, habits, and life history.

It has been suggested that the Bureau should publish in convenient reference form a list of the species most commonly mentioned, showing the scientific name with its common equivalent. The list which follows is not offered as complete. Where two or more common names occur, the first-mentioned is given as the one in most general use and the one which it is desirable should be universally accepted. The species adapted for present commercial use are indicated by the use of boldface type, but some of the marked species

^a By Robert E. Coker, director of the United States Fisheries Biological Station, Fairport, Iowa.

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are not highly valued and others that are not here rated as commercial are sometimes used in manufacture.

In a third column there are singled out certain qualities or characters which determine the commercial rating. The record of these qualities will be of some value and will also serve to aid anyone familiar with mussels to relate the common and scientific names in cases of present confusion. The list thus becomes a catalogue of the commercial and noncommercial species more commonly encountered by pearlery and shell fishermen.

It may be noted that while a commercial species may vary in quality according to the locality from which it comes, it is almost universally true that a commercial species is a commercial species wherever found. A striking exception is the case of the fat mucket, which, as found in some lakes, is entirely worthless, while in other places, as in Lake Pepin, it appears as one of the most valuable of all shells. It seems unavoidable, therefore, that a distinctive name, such as "Lake Pepin mucket," should be retained in use for the good form characteristic of certain bodies of water. It may be added that the Lake Pepin mucket is not a true mucket, but is really a fat mucket which is greatly superior not only to ordinary fat muckets but even to the true muckets of the river or of Lake Pepin itself. A more appropriate common name might be desirable, but it is not our purpose here to create new names, and "Lake Pepin mucket" represents an unmistakable type.

Two questions that may arise from perusal of the list may be anticipated. The three-ridge and the blue-point are certainly not regularly distinguished. Perhaps the two species (*Q. undulata* and *Q. plicata*) are somewhat arbitrary. As used here, the three-ridge (*undulata*) is the more compressed form characteristic of headwater streams or shallow clearer streams, and the blue-point (*plicata*) is characteristic of the deeper and slacker waters of main streams. Essentially the same difference of distribution is noted in the case of the two purple warty-backs—the more compressed *Q. tuberculata* and the heavier *Q. granifera*; as the shells of neither are valued, no distinction by common name has arisen in this case.

The scientific nomenclature followed is that of Simpson's descriptive catalogue.^a Investigations of the present and future will lead to some permanent changes of scientific nomenclature, which will probably affect generic names (the first name in each case) more than specific names (the second name). It seems obviously advisable to follow the only complete monograph now available, even though a revision might be necessary after some years.

^a Simpson, Charles Torrey: A descriptive catalogue of the Naiades or pearly fresh-water mussels. Bryant Walker, publisher, Detroit, Mich., 1914.

LIST OF THE COMMON MUSSEL SPECIES AND SOME OF THEIR CHARACTERS.

[NOTE.—C after the scientific name indicates that the species is used commercially, but that owing to its scarcity or inferior quality it has little standing as a commercial shell.]

Scientific name.	Common name.	Characters.
<i>Alasmidonta calceola</i>	Slipper-shell <i>a</i>	Very small.
<i>Alasmidonta marginata</i>	Elk-toe.....	Small.
<i>Anodonta corpulenta</i>	Slop-bucket.....	Inflated, thin-shelled.
<i>Anodonta grandis</i>	Floater.....	Thin-shelled.
<i>Arcidens confragosus</i>	Rock pocketbook; bastard; rock-shell.....	Rough exterior, inclined to be thin and brittle.
<i>Cyprogenia irrorata</i> , C	Fan-shell; ringed warty-back <i>a</i>	Quality acceptable but hard; rather small and scarce.
<i>Dromus dromus</i> , C	Dromedary mussel <i>a</i>	Similar to fan-shell in quality.
<i>Lampsilis alata</i>	Pink heel-splitter; pancake; hatchet-back.....	Thin, brittle; generally purple or pink.
Lampsilis anodontoides	Yellow sand-shell ; banana-shell.....	Best for novelty and export trade; well known.
<i>Lampsilis capax</i>	Pocketbook.....	Thin, inflated, often pink; not commonly distinguished from <i>ventricosa</i> .
<i>Lampsilis fallaciosus</i> , C	Slough sand-shell; bank-climber (Indiana).....	Thinnish; large shells used; similar to yellow sand-shell, but restricted in distribution, and generally too thin and small.
<i>Lampsilis gracilis</i>	Paper-shell.....	Very thin.
Lampsilis higginsii	Higgin's eye	Ranks with mucket.
<i>Lampsilis iris</i>	Rainbow-shell <i>a</i>	Small; like a very young mucket.
<i>Lampsilis lævissima</i>	Paper-shell.....	Very thin.
Lampsilis ligamentina	Mucket ; includes grass mucket.....	Staple shell; well known.
Lampsilis ligamentina gibba	Southern mucket ; yellow-back mucket.....	Unsurpassed for buttons.
Lampsilis luteola	Fat mucket ; Lake Pepin mucket	Cuts and finishes with least waste; quality excellent.
<i>Lampsilis ovata</i>	Grandma; southern pocket-book <i>a</i>	Like <i>ventricosa</i> , but thinner and more brittle.
<i>Lampsilis perdix</i>	Pheasant shell <i>a</i>	Like mucket, but too brittle and thin.
<i>Lampsilis purpurata</i>	Purply.....	Thin and purple-naered.
Lampsilis recta	Black sand-shell ; long John; honest John (Michigan).....	White examples good; in form like yellow sand-shell.
Lampsilis ventricosa	Pocketbook	Inflated; inclined to brittleness; useful for novelties.
<i>Margaritana margaritifera</i>	River pearl mussel.....	Thin; not found in Mississippi Basin; pearl mussel of Europe and north-Atlantic drainage.
<i>Margaritana monodonta</i>	Spectacle-case.....	Thin and brittle.
<i>Medionidus subtentus</i>	Fluted kidney-shell.....	Small.
<i>Micromya celata</i>	Bird-wing <i>a</i>	Very small.
<i>Oblivaria reflexa</i> , C	Three-horned warty-back.....	Small; otherwise equal to pimple-back.
Obovaria ellipsis	Hickory-nut ; Missouri niggerhead.....	Good; yields some "iridescents;" acceptable with niggerhead.
<i>Plagiola elegans</i>	Deer-toe.....	Small, white.
Plagiola securis	Butterfly	Excellent, but never abundant; quality like mucket, but superior.
<i>Pleurobema æsopus</i> , C	Bullhead; sheepnose; "clear profit.".....	Tough, brittle.
<i>Ptychobranchus phaseolus</i> , C	Kidney-shell.....	Good, but hard and scarce.
<i>Quadrula coccinea</i> , C	Flat niggerhead.....	Quality good, but yields many "tips;" thin; often pink.
<i>Quadrula cylindrica</i>	Rabbit's foot.....	Long, narrow, rough back; hard; often stained.
Quadrula ebenus	Niggerhead	Unsurpassed; yields "iridescents."
<i>Quadrula granifera</i>	Purple warty-back.....	Good quality, but purple-naered.
Quadrula heros	Washboard	Very large; usually second grade; often discolored by stains; valued chiefly for large buttons.
Quadrula lachrymosa	Maple-leaf	Rough back; excellent in texture; yields "iridescents," but thinnish at tips.
Quadrula metanera	Monkey-face	Like maple-leaf, but inferior.
Quadrula obliqua	Ohio River pig-toe	Good quality; pure white, but lacking in luster.
Quadrula plicata	Blue-point	Staple shell of second quality.
<i>Quadrula pustulata</i> , C	} Pimple-back ; warty-back.....	Quality good; yields iridescents; almost equal to niggerhead. These two species not commonly distinguished.
Quadrula pustulosa		
<i>Quadrula subrotunda</i> , C	Long solid.....	Like niggerhead.
<i>Quadrula trapezoides</i>	Bank-climber.....	Purple naere.
<i>Quadrula tuberculata</i>	Purple warty-back.....	Purple; not distinguished from <i>granifera</i> .
Quadrula undata	Pig-toe	Good; somewhat inferior to niggerhead.
Quadrula undulata	Three-ridge	Like <i>plicata</i> ; quality superior, but thinnish at tip.
<i>Strophitus edentulus</i>	Squaw-foot.....	Thin, inflated; generally yellowish.

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Scientific name.	Common name.	Characters.
<i>Symphynota complanata</i> , C.	White heel-splitter; hackle-back; elephant's ear (Indiana).	Large examples good, but often brittle.
<i>Symphynota costata</i>	Fluted shell.....	Generally too thin and off-color.
<i>Tritogonia tuberculata</i>	Buckhorn ; pistol-grip.....	Rough exterior; quality good.
<i>Truncilla arcæformis</i>	Sugar-spoon <i>a</i>	Small.
<i>Truncilla capsæformis</i>	Oyster mussel <i>a</i>	
<i>Truncilla haysiana</i>	Acorn-shell <i>a</i>	
<i>Truncilla sulcata</i>	Cat's paw; pewee.....	
<i>Truncilla triquetra</i>	Snuffbox <i>a</i>	
<i>Unio crassidens</i>	Elephant's ear	Nacre generally purple, pink, or salmon; quality otherwise unsurpassed, nacre be- ing soft but firm; preferred for novelties.
<i>Unio gibbosus</i>	Lady-finger; spike	Resembles elephant's ear, but smaller, longer, and often with uneven inner sur- face.

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