

Southern Appalachian Creature Feature Podcasts

Chucky madtom

Greetings and welcome to the Southern Appalachian Creature Feature.

The chucky madtom is one of Southern Appalachia's rarest fish, found only from a single stream in a single county in Eastern Tennessee. Only 14 specimens of the fish have ever been documented, the last sighting in 2004. This comes despite regular, and sometimes exhaustive, searches by biologists.

Madtoms are small catfish, and the chucky madtom, like all madtoms, lives on the stream bottom, finding shelter beneath the rocks, logs, and other debris. The effort to provide the fish with plenty of shelter led biologists to a novel conservation tool – flower pot saucers. The saucers were inverted and glued one on top of the other. Stones were glued in the basin of the lower saucer to help hold the structure in place. The upper saucer has a hole on the edge for the fish to swim in and out, and notches for water flow. So far, 70 of the shelters have been placed in Little Chucky Creek and biologists will check them about every two weeks to gauge success.

Inspiration for the project came from research with the Carolina madtom in the Piedmont area of North Carolina. There, biologists had success getting the fish to use the structures in the wild, and laboratory research showed they actually preferred the artificial structure to natural shelters like rocks, mussel shells, and leaves.

For WNCW and the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, this is Gary Peeples.