

# Rare snails found in canyon where they weren't expected

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More than 1,000 rare snails have been found in southern Utah's Kanab Canyon, where they had been thought to no longer live.

Vicky Meretsky, an assistant professor of conservation biology and ecosystem ecology at Indiana University, discovered the Kanab ambersnails last week at an animal sanctuary while she was studying the same type of snails on nearby lands.

"It really was fairly unexpected," Meretsky said. "It gives us another population in a new location and that's always a good thing."

Meretsky believes there are at least 1,000 of the *Oryzomys haydeni kanabensis* in the wetlands along the Kanab Creek, which runs through Best Friends Sanctuary, a home for abandoned or abused animals. The biologist also found the snails on adjacent land owned by the Bureau of Land Management.

With the discovery, scientists have identified populations of the rare snail in three areas.

The snails were first discovered

in 1910 in Kanab Canyon, near the animal sanctuary. Snails also were found three miles away on private property in Three Lakes Canyon, where they now number about 100,000, according to the Fish and Wildlife Service.

When the landowner in Three Lakes proposed building an RV park that would have destroyed the snails in 1991, the FWS declared them an endangered species.

During the listing process, snails were found in Vasey's Paradise in the Grand Canyon, but FWS could not locate any in Kanab Canyon. The ambersnail was considered to have disappeared from there — until now.

Meretsky and FWS officials believe the snails always existed in the wetlands surrounding Kanab Creek, but scientists did not look in the right spots in the early 1990s.

"If you look in the spring or late in the fall, they're dormant," Meretsky said. "If you should misunderstand the habitat and look in too dry a place or too wet a place . . . you're not going to find them."

Genetic testing may prove the snails in Vasey's Paradise are not the same as those in Three Lakes Canyon. While the snails look and act alike, they may have different DNA codes. Already, they live in different habitats. Those in the Grand Canyon live among vegetation on rocky hillsides, while the Kanab snails exist in wetlands.

FWS also will use genetic testing to see if the snails found in Kanab Canyon are the same as those in Three Lakes Canyon.

Raphael de Peyer, spokesman for Best Friends, said the sanctuary was not concerned with the restrictions on land use that typically occur when there are endangered species involved.

"We don't have a problem because we are an animal sanctuary," he said.

The FWS does not expect to curtail any activities on BLM land either. "We don't see anything that is going on right now that is incompatible with the conservation of the species," said Larry England, an official with FWS in Salt Lake City.