

# Conservation Officer's report 2023

Mollusc conservation by members continued in 2023 across the full range of conservation activities, from survey of rare species (e.g. *Ena montana*) to collecting specimens for DNA sequencing, promoting access to papers, to policy, publicity and protest at development pressures.

Martin Willing and Ben Rowson continued surveying for *Vertigo angustior* for 'Natur am Byth! Saving Wales' threatened species! project. This is Wales' flagship Green Recovery project involving nine environmental charities with Natural Resources Wales (NRW) to deliver conservation and outreach for threatened species. Martin and Ben surveyed on the Gower in autumn 2023, including a direct comparison between bulk sampling and suction sampling methods. The results and report are still in preparation and the last surveys will be completed in 2024.

Tom Walker and Mags Cousins led a field meeting to Semley Wiltshire Wildlife Trust Reserve on 13<sup>th</sup> May with staff from the Natural History Museum 'Darwin Tree of Life' (DTOL) project. The purpose of the field meeting was to survey the reserve for molluscs for the first time and to collect specimens for the DTOL project. Chris Fletcher from the NHM gave a talk on 17<sup>th</sup> February 2024 for the Society and explained that the aim of the DTOL project is to collect representatives of all eukaryotic organisms in the British Isles and sequence their entire genomes. There were still a number of mollusc species which the project lacked, some due to their rarity, but many widespread species simply because there are not many recorders for this group.

Arising from the legislative changes and government initiatives mentioned in the 2022 report (the legally binding targets of the Environment Act 2021, D4: Relative abundance and/or distribution of widespread species, to halt the decline in species populations by 2030; and the target to reduce the risk of species extinction, D5: Conservation status of our native species) has been the establishment of Local Nature Recovery Strategies (LNRSs). Each LNRS will agree priorities for nature recovery and propose actions in the locations where it would make a particular contribution to achieving those priorities.

Responsible authorities have been appointed to lead on preparing a LNRS for their area. Together these 48 strategy areas cover the whole of England with no gaps or overlaps. The LNRSs are generally aligned with county boundaries and the local authorities are currently drawing up their long and short lists of priority species, and requests are starting to filter through (Nottinghamshire and Gloucestershire) to the Conchological Society for help in understanding the conservation priorities for molluscs in their areas.

Predictably pressures on important mollusc habitat continue and a proposal for a golf course at Coul Links has resurfaced. The Society wrote to Lorna Slater MSP for Lothian Region and Scotland First Minister Humza Yousef regarding a called-in planning application for the Coul Links Golf Course proposal, land 1700 m north-west of Embo Community Centre, Embo. A reply was received that 'confirmed Scottish Ministers have called in this application for determination to allow further consideration of the application as the case raises issues of national significance with regard to the proposed development's potential impact on nationally and internationally important natural heritage assets and the need for an appropriate understanding of the scale and degree of potential economic benefits arising from the proposal. A reporter from the Planning and Environmental Appeals Division (DPEA) of the Scottish Government will be appointed, in due course, to examine this proposed

## Mags Cousins

development and report, with recommendations, to Ministers who will make the final decision on this application'.

It will interest members that the Mollusc Specialist Group of the Species Survival Commission of the International Union for Conservation of Nature issue an online newsletter called *Tentacle*. The latest issue, No. 32 for March 2024 ([https://www.hawaii.edu/cowielab/Tentacle/Tentacle\\_32.pdf](https://www.hawaii.edu/cowielab/Tentacle/Tentacle_32.pdf)), explains how the *Journal of Conchology* has gone open access and online. This is welcome additional publicity for the journal, for existing and potential authors, and recognition of the huge efforts of (latterly and especially) Tom Walker to orchestrate this change and Peter Barfield to ensure the journals were made available via the Society's website. Past issues back to volume 39 (2006) are available on our website and older issues will be available at the Biodiversity Heritage Library (BHL) website (<https://www.biodiversitylibrary.org/bibliography/45410>). Members of the Society may submit and publish for free, but non-members are encouraged to either join the Society or pay the £100 fee, or if they are struggling with this fee to apply to the Cameron Fund. This small fund was generously donated by Robert Cameron to assist those that cannot afford to pay the publication fee.

Awareness, and perhaps understanding and tolerance, of molluscs continues to build through the outreach of members in the more popular press. Ben Rowson joined Jack Perks, a wildlife cameraman, as the guest naturalist for the podcast on Slugs: 'Slugs: gardeners' friend (<https://beardedtit.podbean.com/e/slugs-gardeners-friend-or-foe-ft-ben-rowson/>). Ben gave an informative and entertaining interview about slugs and snails, their ecology, evolution, reproduction and habitat preferences. Other malacologists have also contributed to Jack's natural history podcasts, with Jon Ablett having been interviewed about 'Giant squid: release the kraken!' (<https://beardedtit.podbean.com/?s=squid>).

The BBC News Gloucestershire article about the ghost slug *Selenochlamys ysbryda*: 'Rare worm-eating ghost slug spotted on Stroud path' (<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-gloucestershire-68664252>) sparked some submissions of records, although without photos it would be unwise to accept these records as there are other white slugs with which it could be confused by the unsuspecting public.

Further molluscan publicity came from the Royal Horticultural Society (RHS) and the Wildlife Trusts who joined forces to launch a campaign urging people to 'make friends with molluscs' (<https://www.wildlifetrusts.org/news/make-friends-molluscs>). They produced a friendly-looking leaflet which explains the value of molluscs, and how to identify and learn to live with slugs and snails in the garden.

All is not rosy with molluscs, however, and in 2023 Martin Willing was working on risk assessments for invasive mollusc species for the Non-Native Species Secretariat, reported in *Mollusc World* 64: 22. Three new mollusc risk assessments (<https://www.nonnativeSpecies.org/non-native-species/risk-analysis/risk-assessment>) were added to the NNSS website, for the Chinese mystery snail *Cipangopaludina chinensis*, the Chinese pond mussel *Sinanodonta woodiana* and the Atlantic oyster drill *Urosalpinx cinerea*. These were available for public comment until 12<sup>th</sup> April 2024.

As always, many thanks to all the members who have contributed to mollusc conservation in 2023, which I am sure is much more than can be mentioned here.