

Field Meeting: Beckingham, Nottinghamshire. 15 September 2007

Chris de Feu

The visit to Nottinghamshire was planned for September in the hope of enjoying better conditions for finding slugs in the damper autumn weather. Previous field visits in the area, during the summer have been plagued by hot, dry summer weather. Naturally, after a very wet summer, the three weeks prior to this event were very dry. This resulted in very dry, cracked soil and molluscs distinctly hard to find.

We had hoped to examine several habitats in the parish including areas on the Trent flood plain but, as usual, mollusc hunters tend to move at a pace comparable to their quarry. By the end of the day we had examined an area of river side flood plain, the disturbed area at an old willow works a garden and two patches of woodland. The meadow land patches, sadly, being left unexamined. A measure of the difficulty of finding molluscs was the slug count in the garden - only 5 species of slug compared to the total of 20 I had recorded over the last decade. My special piece of plywood, placed in the shade under a hedge rarely has fewer than 6 species resting under it. On this occasion, not a single slug was present. In spite of this the event seemed to be enjoyed by the team. I cannot think why.

Of the 44 species found, 13 represented 10km records new to the 1999 atlas. Two more were the listed in the atlas only as fossils - *Acanthinula aculeata* (O.F.Müller, 1774) and *Carychium (Saraphia) tridentatum* (Risso, 1826). Looking at the known distributions of the species found, it seemed that we were filling gaps in a much under-recorded area, with most species having been found in adjacent, better recorded squares.



Prickly snail *Acanthinula aculeata*

Photo Derek Rands

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Most interesting finds, perhaps, were the large black slug and the tiny Prickly Snail, *Acanthinula aculeata*. The slug gave a spectacular rocking performance. Ron captured this on video - what a pity video clips cannot be included in a printed magazine. This slug was clearly a king of rock, a veritable Elvis impersonator. The Prickly Snail was most interesting creature for those of us unfamiliar with it.

The apparent relative richness of the Willow Works is, perhaps, explained by the two habitats represented there - the nearby land drainage ditch and surrounds of the building, much influenced by human activity including extensive use of limestone hardcore in the past. Beckingham Wood, which is ancient woodland, was rather less productive than hoped or expected. Dogs Hole Wood, a much smaller area and not subject to management for pheasant shooting was more relatively more productive.

The most surprising find was a collection of shells. We considered that the heap, which included a few large tropical land snail and a number of tropical coral reef species, was a child's discarded shell collection rather than evidence of a former coral reef in the Trent flood plain in former times. These records, of course, will not be included in the national map; not even as records of 'shells only'.

Leaders of field meetings will be familiar with the joys of completing risk assessment forms. but how can you be sure that you have considered every risk? With hindsight I feel we should have added the risk of small rodents running up my trouser legs. Perhaps adequate risk-amelioration measures should include the mandatory wearing of bicycle clips. Adrian scored all five wasp stings of the day. (Serves him right for laughing at my contortions - a direct consequence of the mouse and trouser incident.)

Typically, after the long, dry spell the autumn rain began falling the next week.

Acknowledgements

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