

Conservation Officer's Report 2012

Advice and help:

A wide variety of help and advice has been given to various organisations and individuals including identification of specimens, and habitat management / conservation guidance. Selected examples include:

- **Pagham Harbour:** The RSPB took over the management of Pagham Harbour LNR from West Sussex County Council and The Sussex Wildlife Trust in 2012. The site is a very important for a wide range of wetland, brackish, upper-tidal and fully marine molluscs. The Harbour supports regionally important populations of *Truncatella subcylindrica*, *Leucophytia bidentata* and the Wildlife & Countryside Act protected *Caecum armoricum* (Pain *et al* 2009: J. Conch. 39: 779 – 780). In August 2012 I joined RSPB staff to inspect key areas of the reserve to discuss management options to assist in the conservation of these and other molluscs.

Image 1: view of *Truncatella subcylindrica* habitat – Pagham Harbour

- ***Segmentina nitida* translocation:** In late 2012 the RSPB received a request by the Kent Wildlife Trust (working in association with Christ Church University, Canterbury) to introduce captive bred *Segmentina nitida* to ditches on an RSPB reserve at Willow Farm, Lydden Kent. The Conch Soc was invited to comment upon the proposals. I reviewed the background information and advised caution. The proposals were to be further considered by RSPB and the Society in 2013.

• **Image 2: view of *Segmentina nitida* or its habitat**

- **Possible *Pomacea* restrictions:** In February 2012 The Plant Health Policy team at DEFRA asked for the Society's views on possible controls (on sale, importation restrictions and wild release bans) of the Island Apple Snail *Pomacea insularum* (and possibly also the almost indistinguishable *P. canaliculata*), a freshwater species from South America. *P. insularum* has been causing problems in the Ebro delta of Spain, where it has been causing damage to rice production and the natural environment. It has also been causing similar problems in the southern United States. As the snail can currently be imported, bred and traded freely in the UK, there is the possibility of release into the environment, either intentionally or accidentally from outdoor aquaria ponds and other sites. While rice fields and natural wetlands are known to be at risk, other aquatic environments could also be threatened, through impacts on ecosystems and biodiversity. Therefore wetlands and other aquatic bodies both in parts of the UK and elsewhere in the EU could be at risk due its catholic diet and also that it can survive in a range of climatic conditions. The Society sent a reply which stated, " While it would appear that *Pomacea* currently poses a low threat to the UK because it probably has problems coping with our lower temperatures, we would support a precautionary ban on the importation of live animals of all *Pomacea* species into the EU, especially as their importation has no clear, substantial benefits, partly because of likely damage in southern parts of the EU (e.g. the Po Valley); and partly because the potential threat in the UK should not be ignored - there are probably particular local hot spots already where it could establish - suitable conditions are likely to increase if temperatures continue to rise, and the species may also manage to adapt to British conditions".

Image 3: image of *Pomacea* sp

- **Chingford Pond Restoration:** Chingford Pond is part of a pond and stream complex lying south of Petworth in the South Downs National Park. This pond and the adjacent Burton Mill Pond support a large and regionally very important population of the EU Habitats and Species Directive / UK BAP priority *Vertigo moulinsiana*.

There are plans to restore water levels in the pond with a possible impact on populations of the snail. I was able to provide advice on pond restoration plans through the Conservation Committee of the Sussex Wildlife Trust to minimise impact on this important snail population. Consultation to consider management options will continue into 2013 when a planning application is expected.

Image 4: image of Chingford Pond

State of Nature Initiative

I attended a two day conference in Milton Keynes in March 2012 initiated by the RSPB, titled 'Developing a biodiversity indicator for priority species in the UK'. The overall purpose of this event was to bring together representatives (footnote¹) from a wide range of conservation organisations to consider an integrated 'biological indicator' to describe the changing state of UK priority species. The UK Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) process, initially launched in 1995 has, since its introduction, resulted in a substantial amount of survey, monitoring and ecological research work focussed upon BAP priority plants, animals and fungi and lichens (for background see Mollusc World: 3: 14 – 15; 8: 22; 13: 26). There are now 19 non-marine and 3 marine BAP molluscs in the UK (Footnote²). In recent years the Government (through its coordinating organisations: JNCC, English Nature, Countryside Council for Wales, Scottish Natural Heritage) has largely moved away from the BAP process, although BAP species status continues to be used for a range of purposes such as planning application environmental statements and SSSI condition assessments. With the near complete loss of BAP steering groups and reviews, there is no coordinated process to assess the status of our priority species in the UK. This is at a time when threats too much wildlife are increasing with some species in serious decline. Equally, on a more positive note, some taxa are increasing, usually due to conservation efforts - it is equally important to report on these successes.

The workshop was set up with an ambitious agenda; to develop a working partnership between organisations to develop a framework programme of indicators and then take the project forward. Over its two days the workshop discussed and explored:

- data availability and quality;
- indicator species or species groups to be selected;
- options for data trend analysis.

The workshop concluded with the unanimous decision to work over about a year to develop a publication on the 'state of nature in the UK'.

Later in 2012 twenty organisations were invited to complete a 'state of nature' questionnaire covering background views and summary information on priority species. The state of nature report would aim to provide a single, clear message on the current status of species in the UK and UK Overseas Territories. Most of the report would have sections dealing with broad

¹ Representative organisations including: 1. Amphibian & Reptile Conservation, Bat Conservation Trust, Biological Records Centre, British Dragonfly Society, British Trust for Ornithology, Buglife, Bumblebee Conservation Trust, Butterfly Conservation, DEFRA, Hymettus Ltd., JNCC, Mammal Society, Natural England, People's Trust for Endangered Species, Plantlife, Pond Conservation, RSPB, The Conchological Society, The Wildlife Trusts

² Addition of UK BAP Mollusca: listing of 19 non-marine and 3 marine taxa.

habitat types (Footnote³) and for each of these overviews of how different groups of organisms are faring, what are the key 'drivers' of change and illustrations of key conservation projects. Additionally there would be small sections dealing with issues relating more specifically to each country in the UK.

The Conchological Society, along with several other invertebrate organisations was not readily able to provide detailed trend analysis for all but a small number of species. At the time of draft report writing in autumn 2012 much molluscan trend data was in the process of being considered for (1) the governmentally led 'Article 17' reporting to the EU on the condition of species on the EU Habitats and Species Directives (with six non-marine molluscs) and (2) the on-going Red list reviews (Mollusc World 29: 9). Although much general trend data was able to be provided, each of the many species groups were asked to provide 'case-study' details of one or two species. Consideration of the options led to the conclusion that the ideal 'case-study' mollusc to choose was the freshwater pearl mussel, *Margaritifera margaritifera* because:

- It is threatened throughout its international range;
- It is present (just!) in all countries in the UK;
- Except in Scotland it is endangered
- It is one of the few UK molluscs where accurate contemporary trend data is available.

At the end of 2012 early drafts of the 'state of nature' report were launched, but considerable further work was due to be undertaken in early 2013 - further details will appear in my 2013 report. Before the end of 2012 it was decided to launch the State of Nature report at the Natural History Museum in 22nd May 2013, with keynote speakers including David Attenborough.

Image 5: Shot of attendees @ the biodiversity conference or montage of symbols showing the wide range of organisations involved

British Wildlife

Three molluscan 'wildlife reports' were published during 2012. These were able to cover a range of topical and hopefully interesting molluscan issues and to promote the work of the Conchological Society and its members. As such features included digests and discussion of the marine and non-marine reports and details of various joint initiatives involving the Society with other organisations in the production of species management sheets (e.g. Buglife, Suffolk Wildlife Trust and Natural England). Other news included items on Roman snail poaching on the North Downs, losses of pearl mussels in Cumbria, new nudibranch finds to the UK and reports of additional *Helix lucorum* finds.

The 6th Quinquennial Review of the Wildlife & Countryside Act, 1981

'Hot on the heels' of the 5th Quinquennial Review (QQR) of the Wildlife and Countryside Act (Mollusc World 29: 8) came the consultation launch of the 6th QQR. Member organisations of Invertebrate Link decided to form a steering group so that invertebrate responses to the review could be coordinated; I represented molluscan interests as a member of the group. We were still in the process of discussing matters at the end of 2012. For molluscs it is likely that recommendations forwarded for the 5th QQR, but dropped by JNCC before being sent to DEFRA, will be resubmitted. Final discussions will take place in 2013.

³ **Broad habitat types:** 1 enclosed farmland, 2. Lowland semi-natural habitats, 3. Uplands, 4. Marine & coastal, 5. Freshwater & wetlands, 6. Urban and 7. Woodlands.

Associations with other organisations:

The Society actively associates with many other conservation organisations. These include Buglife, which, since its launch over ten years ago, has become an influential invertebrate campaigning organisation (www.buglife.org.uk/) and Invertebrate Link (www.royensoc.co.uk/InvLink/Index.html), which meets biannually providing a forum where representatives from NGOs and governmental conservation bodies meet to discuss and take action on 'all matters invertebrate'. Other key partners have included the RSPB and the Wildlife Trusts. As a member of the Sussex Wildlife Trust's Conservation Committee I have been able to represent molluscan interests and contribute a records report to Adastral, the annual review of wildlife recording in the county (www.sxbrc.org.uk/). In January 2012 I attended a conference at the University of Brighton run by the Sussex Wildlife Trust titled, 'Water & Wetlands: Key issues and future priorities for Sussex' – much of the content had direct molluscan relevance.

Martin J. Willing - March 2013