

Slugs and Snails beware!

MIKE BLOXHAM

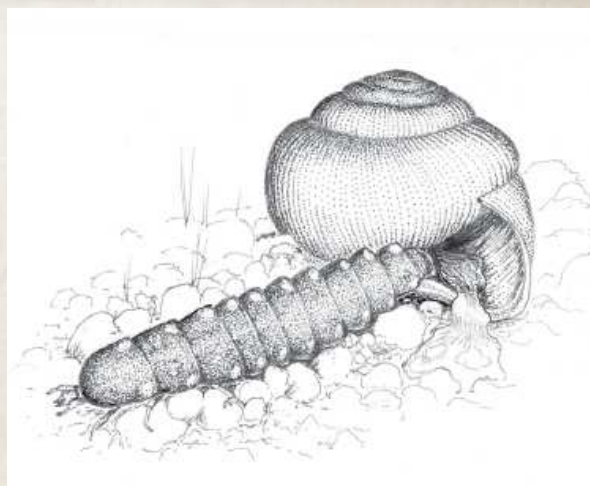


Snail Hunter, *Cychrus caraboides*,

Rosemary Winnall

Molluscs have plenty of enemies. Here are two insect ones encountered in Wyre. The Snail Hunter *Cychrus caraboides* is a predatory ground beetle adapted to hunt both slugs and snails. It probably uses its extraordinary spoon-like palps to 'taste' its prey (Wheater), being able to follow slime trails and predate slugs at the end of them. If a snail is involved, the elongate head and jaws will allow it to enter a variety of different sized shells to attack the occupants. Several other ground beetles with related special adaptations also target molluscs.

Whilst *Cychrus* is sizeable at around 18 mm in length, it is reclusive and dark in colouration - certainly no 'star' in the rich firmament of forest insects - the very opposite of the familiar Glow-worm *Lampyris noctiluca*, females of which advertise their presence with nocturnal pulses of greenish light from the 'tail' area where special organs are located. This bioluminescence is rare in UK beetles. After mating the females lay eggs which develop into larvae and at this stage, which lasts for

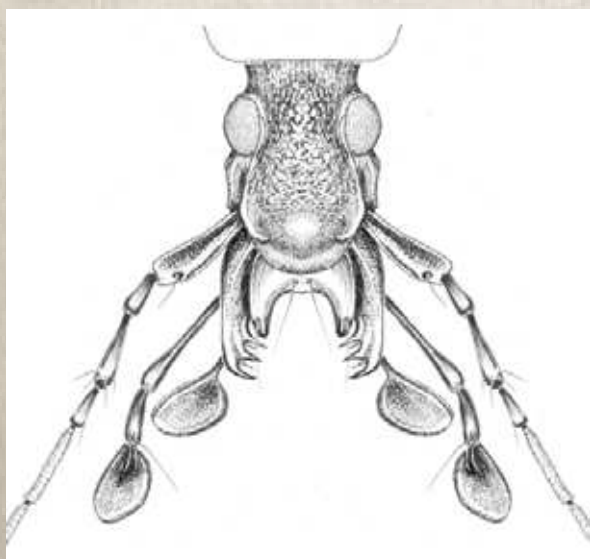


Glow-worm larva leaving snail

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several months, these devour slugs and snails (above is a picture of one vacating a victim's shell). The Glow-worm is a rather local beetle, but has been the subject of an extended study, with fairly stable populations being recorded over a five year period at Pound Green (WFSG Review 2003,2005 and 2006). The late Dr David Harris played a major part in initiating this work.

WHEATER, C. P. (1989), Prey detection by some predatory Coleoptera (Carabidae and Staphylinidae). *Journal of Zoology*, 218: 171-185.



Snail Hunter, *Cychrus caraboides* mouth parts

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Female Glow-worm, Pound Green

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