

Slender Pond Snail *Omphiscola glabra* (Muller,1774) in Wyre Forest.

Brett Westwood



01. Hawkbatch pool, habitat of *Omphiscola glabra*. Brett Westwood.

Ever since I was shown a specimen in a shallow shaded pool in the New Forest over a decade ago by Jonathan Biggs of the Freshwater Habitats Trust, I've dreamed of finding the Slender Pond Snail, also known as the Mud Snail *Omphiscola glabra* in Wyre Forest. Although we have searched for this species on our Wyre Forest Study Group field trips the snail remained elusive until spring 2022.

On April 27, after an unproductive morning in the west of Wyre, I called at the Forest England car park at Hawkbatch for some impromptu pond-dipping. The roadside pool near the car-park is shaded by willows *Salix* and surrounding birch *Betula* and oak *Quercus* (01). Conifer plantations lie beyond the immediate surroundings of the pool which is deepest near the road end. Further back from the road it becomes shallower and heavily vegetated (02) with Jointed Rush *Juncus articulatus*, Bog Pondweed *Potamogeton polygonifolius* Water Horsetail *Equisetum fluviatile* and a number of locally scarce plants such as Marsh Speedwell *Veronica scutellata*. It was reported in the transactions of the Worcester Naturalists' Club as "plashy pool" and has been known since the 1840s. Water levels fall in summer as drainage into the flush from the alder *Alnus* coppice above it was reduced in the exceptional dry summer of 2022, only a small area of water remained at the road end.

Not expecting much, I dipped my net into the shallows at the pool's mid-point where the water was almost invisible under the mats of vegetation and hauled out its dripping cargo. There among the plant stems, dragonfly nymphs and Palmate Newts *Lissotriton helveticus* was a single snail, its elongated amber shell darkened in places by staining. Surely this couldn't be *Omphiscola* after just one dip? Slightly bemused by my catch, I took photographs (03) and retained the specimen alive so that I could share images with Rosemary Winnall and Rosemary Hill of the British Conchological Society and both also members of the Wyre Forest Study Group.



02. A heavily vegetated area of Hawkbatch pool providing habitat for *Omphiscola glabra*. Brett Westwood.

To my delight, they confirmed that my specimen was indeed *Omphiscola glabra*, the Slender Pond Snail or Mud Snail. Ben Rowson of the British Conchological Society confirmed that there is just one prior record for VC37, from Hartlebury in 1913. The Hawkbatch pool is technically in VC39, but scrapes into modern-day Worcestershire by a few tens of metres.

The next day, April 28th, Rosemary Winnall and I returned to the site and found two more immature *Omphiscola* (04) and a batch of eggs in jelly, attached to a pondweed leaf, which we believed were produced by *Omphiscola*. We found no other water snails in the pool apart from Jenkins' Spire Snail *Potamopyrgus antipodarum*.

We released all specimens back into the pool after photographing them.



03. Adult *Omphiscola glabra*, Hawkbatch pool. 28.04.22. Brett Westwood.



04. Adult and juveniles of *Omphiscola glabra*, Hawkbatch pool. 28.04.22. Brett Westwood.

Reaching up to 25mm in length, the adult snail is comparatively easy to distinguish from other water snails by its slender, gently tapering shell and the narrow teardrop-shaped aperture. The juveniles are rounder and need more careful distinction. Habitat is a useful guide as typically, *Omphiscola* is found in seasonal, nutrient-poor ponds which dry out or reduce in summer, often on heaths or commons. The snail retreats into the mud or burrows beneath vegetation during the “dry” season.

Because it prefers more ancient or traditionally-managed landscapes, it is rare or absent from areas of intensive agriculture: its strongholds in the UK include the Yorkshire commons and the New Forest, but it is very local and has been in decline since 1960. *Omphiscola* is a flagship species for the Freshwater Habitats Trust and as a result of public awareness, a number of additional sites have been identified nationally, but it remains isolated and threatened in many areas.

Following our discovery, Rosemary Winnall and I alerted Phil Rudlin, Conservation Officer for Forest England (FE). FE and Natural England were planning pond management at this site and others in Wyre Forest and we were concerned that inappropriate interventions might adversely affect the snail at a site where it may have occurred incognito for over a century. In summer John Bingham, Rosemary and I met Phil on site and he was able to reassure us that management would be minimal and appropriate to the habitat and would take into account the needs of *Omphiscola*. It is yet another of Wyre’s “special” molluscs (others include *Leiostryla anglica* and *Spermatodea lamellata*) which demonstrate the value of retaining and conserving even small areas of suitable habitat and we hope that its future in the Forest is assured.

Acknowledgements

My thanks to Rosemary Hill of the British Conchological Society for confirming the identification of *Omphiscola glabra*. I am also grateful to John Bingham for his help with information about Hawkbatch pool and to him and Rosemary Winnall for their support and interest in the future of the pool’s management. Our meeting with Phil Rudlin was encouraging and we are grateful to Phil for his willingness to help conserve the character of the pool and to safeguard the Slender Pond Snail.

References

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Images

- 01. Hawkbatch pool, habitat of *Omphiscola glabra*. Brett Westwood.
- 02. A heavily vegetated area of Hawkbatch pool providing habitat for *Omphiscola glabra*. Brett Westwood.
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