

**The Horse Leech *Haemopsis sanguisuga* (L., 1758)  
(Arhynchobdellida, Haemopidae) consuming a slug  
*Arion circumscriptus* Johnston, 1828 on dry land at  
Hill and Moor, Worcestershire.**

Paul F. Whitehead  
Moor Leys, Little Comberton, Pershore, Worcestershire, WR10  
3EH. Email: [paul@thewhiteheads.eu](mailto:paul@thewhiteheads.eu)  
All images © Joan Whitehead.

The status of the Horse Leech *Haemopsis sanguisuga* (L., 1758) is perhaps somewhat obscure in midland England but in the Pershore area of the Lower River Avon valley it is known to be widely scattered along muddy tributaries and probably occurs in many of the historically important marsh drains that characterise floodplains at Wick, Pershore and Hill and Moor for example. A quiescent specimen that eventually became 150 mm long was found in a tributary stream in my Little Comberton garden on 19 December 2013.

*Haemopsis sanguisuga* is an amphibious avid carnivore (Mann & Watson, 1964) taking earthworms, snails, insect larvae, tadpoles and other leeches (Mellanby, 1948). Its large mouth occupies most of anterior sucker. This muscular aperture is lined with sharp teeth, which unlike those of the Medicinal Leech *Hirudo medicinalis* L., 1758, are unlikely to penetrate human skin.

On 25 March 2016 on the River Avon floodplain at Hill and Moor (52°11'N 2°03'W SO9746) on grassland some six metres distant from Lench Ditch I encountered a Horse Leech consuming a slug *Arion circumscriptus* Johnston, 1828 (01) under a piece of rafted timber (01). Shikov (2011) believed that the predation of terrestrial molluscs by *H. sanguisuga* had never been witnessed; under controlled conditions he demonstrated and illustrated how the leeches consumed terrestrial molluscs and this observation is now confirmed in the Warwickshire River Avon valley. In this case, just as Shikov describes, the leech effectively vacuumed up the mollusc.



01. Horse Leech *Haemopsis sanguisuga* consuming the slug *Arion circumscriptus*, Hill and Moor, Worcestershire, 25 March 2016. Joan Whitehead.

#### References

- Mann, K.H. & Watson, E.V. 1964. *A key to the British freshwater leeches with notes on their ecology*. Freshwater Biological Association scientific publication no. 14.
- Mellanby, H. 1948. *Animal life in freshwater, a guide to British freshwater invertebrates*. pp. i-viii, 1-296. Methuen & Co. Ltd London
- Shikov, E.V. 2011. *Haemopsis sanguisuga* (Linnaeus, 1758) (Hirudinea). The first observation of a leech predation on a terrestrial gastropod. *Folia Malacologica* 19(2):103-106.