

The Oyster Drill *Ocenebra erinaceus* (Linnaeus, 1758) (Gastropoda, Muricidae) on the Malvern Hills!

Paul F. Whitehead.

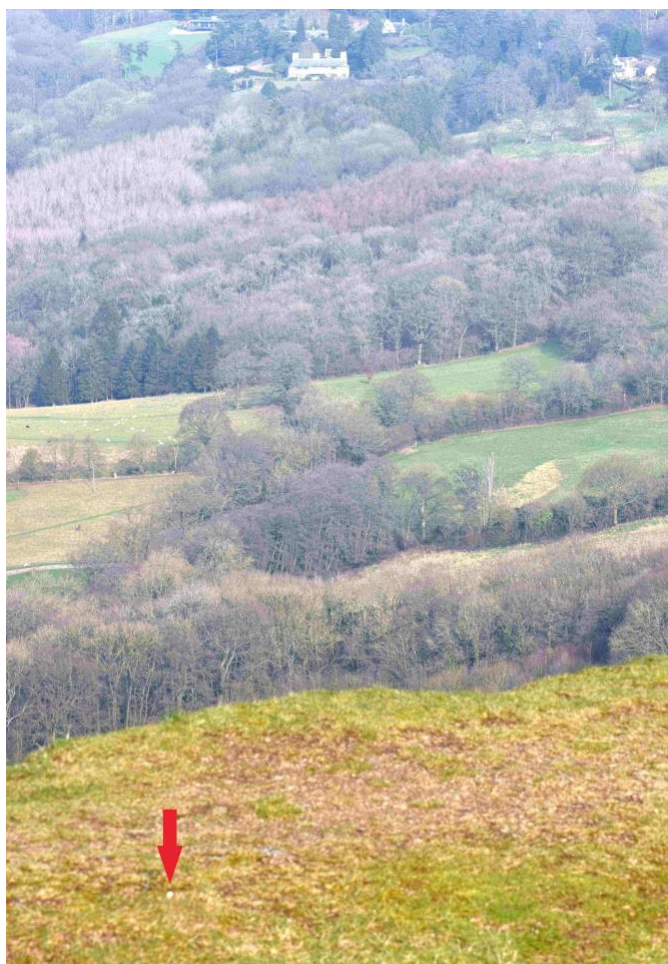
Moor Leys, Little Comberton, Pershore, Worcestershire, WR10 3EH. Email: paulpfw@outlook.com
All photographs © Paul Whitehead.

Introduction

Ocenebra erinaceus (Linnaeus, 1758) is a marine gastropod mollusc characteristic of rocky shores and muddy gravel as a predator of bivalve molluscs. It extends seawards to depths of 150 metres (Fish & Fish, 1989). An example found on 7 February 2020 on the Malvern Hills near the summit of the Herefordshire Beacon (52°05'N 2°35'W VC36 SO759400 334 m a.s.l.) requires some discussion.

Discussion

The shell lacks a little of its apex and has a calcitic serpulid worm tube encrusted on it. It was not found on or near a public footpath but at rather an outlying spot at the summit edge amongst sparse vegetation (01).



01. Malvern Hills, Herefordshire Beacon, aspected NNE, 7 February 2020, the position of the *Ocenebra erinaceus* shell marked.

The nearest breeding populations of *Ocenebra erinaceus* to the Malvern Hills are in the lower reaches of the Bristol Channel about 100 kms to the south-west. Further south and around the Mediterranean Sea area the genus becomes more speciose.

A key question is how did a marine shell arrive on the summit of the Malvern Hills? There appear to be two obvious possibilities

The first is that it was dropped by a person some time prior to February 2020. I do not really see this as a persuasive argument; if

the shell was dropped by a person it would be more likely to have been dropped at a spot where more people assemble more often. Neither is this a particularly interesting item that would necessarily attract a person to it. So human *rejectamenta* remains an uncertain option.

A second option is that the shell was introduced to the site passively by a corvid, possibly a Raven, and this is by no means impossible. Ravens habitually alight at such vantage points. Although the nearest *O. erinaceus* breeding populations could be in the order of 100 kms distant the shell could easily have been moved nearer by tidal activity. Transporting an object this distance, especially internally, would not prove difficult for a Raven. Their powers of aerial endurance were confirmed by Loretto, Schuster & Bugnyar (2016) with some individuals capable of flying up to 43 kms in an hour and some covering up to 164 kms in a day.



02. Shell of *Ocenebra erinaceus*, Malvern Hills, Herefordshire Beacon, 7 February 2020.

This second option is to a large degree confirmed by fortuitous happenstance. Firmly impacted in the aperture of the shell are two rock particles. The larger is a beach pebble but the smaller is a fragment of eroded Malvernian Diorite thereby providing evidence that the origin of the shell could be explained by avian transportation.

References

- Fish J.D. & Fish, S., 1989. *A student's guide to the seashore*, pp.i-xvi, 1-473. Unwin Hyman, London.
Loretto, M.C., Schuster, R. & Bugnyar, T., 2016. GPS tracking of non-breeding ravens reveals the importance of anthropogenic food sources during their dispersal in the Eastern Alps. *Current Zoology* **62**(4): 337–344.