

Cepaea nemoralis

by Victoria Burton

In April I went on a field trip to Box Hill, in Surrey, to learn how to identify land snails. This chalk hill is ideal for snails, which need calcium carbonate from the rocks to grow their shells. There had been lots of rain but it was not too cold, so there were lots of slugs and snails crawling around, especially at night, when they are safer from predatory birds.

These two snails we found mating have different colours, but they belong to the same species: the Brown-Lipped Snail (*Cepaea nemoralis*). This snail comes in brown, pink or yellow, and the number of bands varies from none to five. This is called **polymorphism**, and it occurs because the snails carry different genes, in a similar way that people have different eye and hair colours.





Birds hunt by sight, so snails that stand out from their habitat are more likely to be eaten than those who blend in. This means that Brown-Lipped Snails living in woodland tend to be dark and have more bands, and those living in grassland are more likely to be yellow and not have bands.

In the photograph you can also see white objects stuck into the side of the snails, these are called 'love darts' and are made in a sac inside the snails' body, from calcium carbonate. They are shot into each other during mating, which increases the number of eggs they lay. Not all types of snails produce love darts, in particular the Giant African Land Snails do not. But imagine how big they would be if they did!

Victoria

Snail Factoids

Some snails hibernate - they cover themselves in mucus and go to sleep in winter. But they can also hibernate in summer, sealing themselves in their shells so that they do not dry out. The name given to that is **aestivation**.

Some snails can live for 25 years - although 5 years is more usual.

The top speed for garden snails is around 1.3 cm per second, or 50 yards per hour. But they are among the slowest animals on Earth.

Garden snails have 14,000 teeth!