

Neglect in the Undergrowth



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Snails and slugs were the stars of last night's episode of David Attenborough's Life in the Undergrowth. But today Buglife – The Invertebrate Conservation Trust accuses the Government of neglecting their responsibility to protect endangered snails.

Every government this century has left a legacy of damaged ecosystems and exploited wildlife. While the totemic issue of climate change is attracting the attention of this Government the nuts and bolts of nature conservation seem to be coming loose.

The creature at the centre of conservation concerns is the Roman snail (*Helix pomatia*). This is Britain's largest snail and was established by the Romans throughout their empire for culinary purposes. Since Roman times the snail's wild habitats have become damaged and fragmented causing it to disappear from large areas. In addition, despite there being commercial snail farms, wild populations are being decimated by unscrupulous collectors for the restaurant trade.

The danger is that the Roman snail will go the way of the Roman Empire – terminal decline and extinction. To prevent this happening the snail was listed on the EU Habitats Directive in 1992 and member states are charged with its conservation.

Every five years the Government reviews which plants and animals require legal protection. The last review was in 2001, but with only a month until the start of the next review, results of the 2001 review have not been put into action. Despite a recommendation in 2002 from their own advisor, the Joint Nature Conservation Council, that the snail needed urgent listing, the Government has yet to protect it.

"It is distressing that this snail along with endangered seahorses, rays, a shark and two moths - species that conservationists agree are in need of protection – have suffered more than three years of unnecessarily exploitation. In the USA the political nature of the process for deciding which species should be added to the Schedules of the Endangered Species Act has resulted in five species becoming extinct while languishing on the candidate list. We must not allow this situation to develop in the UK, we must take immediate steps to stop the Roman snail from becoming a culinary footnote." - Matt Shardlow Conservation Director.

On 20th October the European Court found the UK Government guilty on a series of counts of having failed to properly implement the Habitats Directive. "We like to think that we are very good conservationists in the UK, the truth is that we are failing this snail and failing future generations by allowing wildlife to disappear", - Matt Shardlow, Conservation Director.

Notes to Editors:

Buglife-The Invertebrate Conservation Trust is the first organisation in Europe devoted to the conservation of all invertebrates, and is actively engaged in saving Britain's rarest bugs, butterflies, snails, bees, wasps, ants, spiders, beetles and many more fascinating creatures. Set up in 2000, the charity now has six members of staff working on diverse projects including a national bumblebee survey and riverfly conservation. Buglife has developed fun, informative webpages to tie in with the new BBC series, which can be found at: www.buglife.org.uk.

Life in the Undergrowth is the latest in a long line of acclaimed BBC natural history series. Fronted by Sir David Attenborough, the series will lift the lid on a miniature universe living right beneath our feet. Using the latest cameras, viewers will be taken into their world to discover the amazing stories of the most successful creatures on Earth: the invertebrates. The first episode will be shown on Wednesday 23rd November 2005. For further information about the series, visit

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/sn/tvradio/programmes/lifeintheundergrowth/>

The Wildlife and Countryside Act, 1981. This UK act was amended by the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000, which covers England and Wales but not Scotland. Wild birds and certain other wild animals are legally protected. Schedule 5 in the Wildlife and Countryside Act lists the animals, other than birds, that qualify for protection. Schedule 5 is revised every five years. This is the fourth of these 'quinquennial reviews'.

With certain exceptions and exemptions, it is an offence to (without a licence)

- intentionally to take animals listed on Schedule 5 from the wild
- intentionally to kill or injure these wild animals
- to possess any of these wild animals or any part or derivative of them
- intentionally or (in England and Wales) recklessly to damage, destroy or obstruct the places these animals use for shelter and protection or disturb these animals when they are using such places
- to trade in any of these wild animals (live or dead) or any part of them.

EU Habitats Directive 1992. This is the European legislation set up to save endangered species and habitats across Europe. The UK has a poor record of implementing this legislation and the latest wide ranging indictment, including not protecting endangered species from trade and not formally monitoring endangered species and habitats, can be seen at [http://curia.eu.int/jurisp/cgi-bin/form.pl?lang=EN&Submit=Rechercher\\$docrequire=alldocs&numaff=C-6/04&datefs=&datefe=&nomusuel=&domaine=&mots=&resmax=100](http://curia.eu.int/jurisp/cgi-bin/form.pl?lang=EN&Submit=Rechercher$docrequire=alldocs&numaff=C-6/04&datefs=&datefe=&nomusuel=&domaine=&mots=&resmax=100)

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