

Recording Lapidary Snails in the Yorkshire Dales

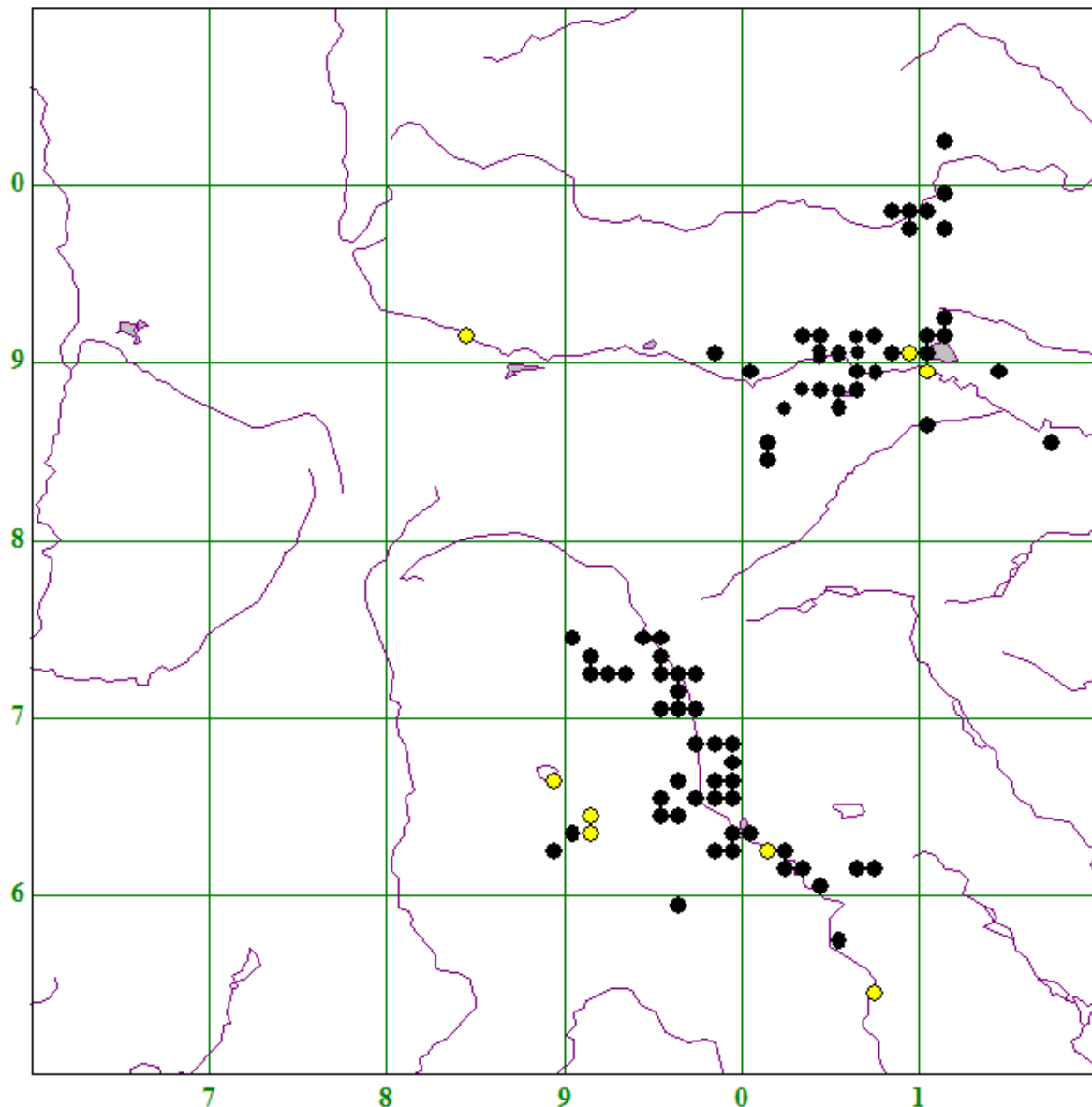
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Helicigona lapidica, the Lapidary Snail is a medium sized snail, about 12mm in width, and rather flat with a sharp keel. As snails go, it is an easy one to identify. During the first lockdown in March 2020 I began a study in the Peak District walking or cycling from home in the White Peak to explore the Carboniferous Limestone. I examined over 1500 dry stone walls and got 179 positive records.



Moving to West Witton in late October 2021, I began to search for snails as I explored a totally new region for me. Adrian Norris, the YNU Recorder for Molluscs, kindly provided me with a dataset of existing records. Most of these are attributed to Adrian and the late David Lindley over many years. I mapped them by 1km. squares and used the map as my guide to further fieldwork, adding a further 30 records in two months.

Lapidary Snail



This map, plotted using DMAP, indicates records post 1980 in black and pre 1980 in yellow. The background shows rivers and waterways with the national grid 10km squares.

Currently there are four geographical clumps, all associated with Carboniferous Limestone. It appears to be widespread in Littondale and Wharfedale, north to Starbotton. So far I have failed to find them at Hubberholme. Around Malham there is an old record for Malham Tarn, and recent records for Janet's Foss and Bordley. In the Wensleydale clump I have found them frequently around Leyburn, West Witton, Waldendale, Coverdale, Redmire and Castle Bolton, but no further west than Ivy Scar. I investigated an old record at Birkrigg but as yet failed to find any. There are frequent records from Jervaulx Abbey, currently the furthest east. There is potential for new discoveries in this area.

To the north, in Swaledale, I have found them at Clapgate, my most northerly record, and in Marrick Park. Other recent records are around Downholme. Searches west of Marrick have so far proved negative.

Most records are from limestone walls, usually those without a moss covering, and frequently those near trees and hawthorns. The snail also likes limestone scree, rocky outcrops and dead wood on dry limestone. In the Peak District I have also found them behind the flaky bark of very mature Sycamores. They tend to like historical features such as old green lanes and undisturbed old walls and are not very frequent in rebuilt walls. Walls plastered by muck-spreading are not suitable, and it is likely that walls subject to fertilisers or herbicides will prove to be harmful. All this, together with atmospheric pollution has led to a very significant national decline and retraction of range. In northern England, the Yorkshire Dales and Peak District are important hot-spots for Lapidary Snails, and we are lucky that the decline seems to be quite localised.

I would welcome any further records. Do keep a look-out for them. Mild damp weather is best.



