

# Moorside Allotments Association



## Slugs & Snails

By Frank Lightfoot

Do you have a problem with slugs and snails? Are you frustrated at the number of plants you put into your garden only to find them devastated the following morning? So what is the solution? Should I go green or resort to chemical warfare? So many questions when all you want to do is grow a few vegetables or flowers.

We all have opinions on the best way to deal with pests in the garden but can we say what is a pest and what is not? I have over 40 years experience in working in allotments and I am still learning and I hopefully will continue to learn for a few more years yet. So my intentions in writing this article are simply to try and inform where needed and to hopefully offer some direction towards coping with a growing problem.

### Types of Slugs and Snails

There are large numbers of different types of slugs and snails, not all of which are our enemies. Some are predators while others are scavengers disposing of decaying material so putting your foot on them all is not the answer. Mind scavengers will eat your produce if your plants are damaged or beginning to die through neglect. Below are a number of images which may be of some assistance in identification.

#### Field Slug

For me this is the one that gets to me as they hide in the soil, in cracks, under objects, along the rims of seed trays and they can destroy young seedlings with the greatest of ease overnight. They will even eat the seeds you have just put in and in a couple of weeks you are cursing your seed supplier having seen little or no evidence them thinking that you have had a bad batch of seeds. They can move at incredible speed - if you don't believe me take a torch at night or dusk and just watch them go



#### Black slug [orange form]

They will eat your seedlings or plants if they are damaged in any way but they do eat a lot of decaying matter so I not have such an issue with these. They can get to some size. I have seen some enormous examples over the years but have never seen them cropping my seedlings.

#### Leopard Slug

If you find one of these in your garden treasure it. They eat other slugs and snails



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## Lemon Snail

These will again eat your plants if they show any damage although in my experience they do tend to be selective. I have found them eating my Runners and French Beans and the petals on my flowers.

## Garden Snail

There has been a population explosion when it comes to Garden Snails. They are to be found

in large numbers all over Moorside. Just turn over a piece of plastic or an old compost bag and you will find all you want. In fact I recently turned over a length of plastic 4ft by 1ft to find over 500 garden snails on it! Yes, I was sad enough to count them as I was just amazed to find so many together. I turned over the next plastic panel to find almost the same number again. These will attack your plants and they will climb canes just to get to the growing tips of your runners and will destroy your marrow plants by eating the growing tip only and then move on to the next one. I do accept that they can be very beautiful creatures and the patterns on their shells are excellent. However my need to grow plants is stronger and they need to go.



## **Is the slug and snail problem only on Moorside Allotments?**

Quite clearly it is not only a problem associated with Moorside as I hear tales of problems on a number of sites but I have noticed a difference between my garden at home and our allotment site so there is an issue with what we are doing or how we are doing it. I live 300 yards from the site as the crow flies so we would assume that the climate is the same, soil conditions are likely to be the same [some variations in clay content but moisture content should be a match].

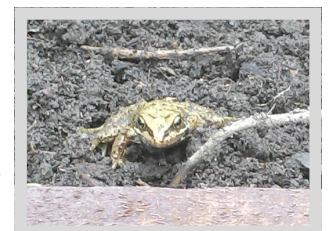
It could be argued that it is the produce that we are growing that is helping to increase the numbers of slugs and snails but I have been doing this for over forty years and have been growing similar produce for a long time and never experienced the assault on my plants like that of the last three years. I have seen potato and rhubarb leaves being reduced to skeletons.

## **Slug and Snail Predators**

Over the years I have often seen gardeners removing frogs from the garden and chasing birds away because they think that all birds are going to eat their crops, standing on beetles and centipedes and smothering the plants in their garden with slug pellets. For me this is not the way forward. We need to know our friends from our enemies and be wary of chemical attacks which do not get at the root cause of our problem. I would suggest that the solving of our slug and snail problem is about good gardening habits and a balance of nature. There are many friends in the garden who with a little encouragement will actively remove these pests at very little cost to ourselves.

## **Frogs and toads**

These will account for a large number of small slugs in particular the little grey slugs that devastate our plants. So a small pond or water feature to encourage frogs to stay and feed in your plot could be an essential tool in controlling pests. I have 3 ponds in my allotment and have always had a large population of frogs in my garden which has helped to keep the balance until quite recently.



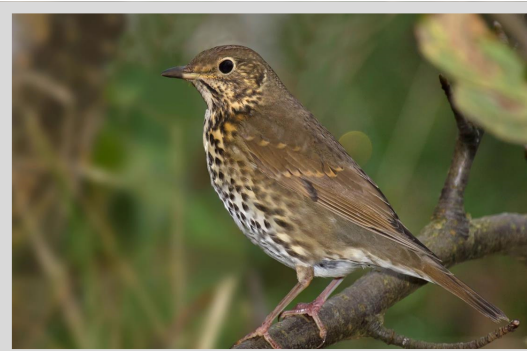


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## Hedgehogs

These eat a large number of slugs and snails and should be encouraged. I have constructed a variety of hedgehog dens / hiding places around my allotment to increase the resident population of hedgehogs. In fact two years ago they had young in a stone den I made for them. The pile of empty shells was testament to the number of snails a family of hedgehogs can eat.



## Thrushes

They eat a large number of snails but they are in short supply at the moment, at one time you saw thrushes on a regular basis on our site but not so much now. I put this down to the fact that they tend to nest in clefts of trees in quite open situations and are very open to magpie attacks. So we should be trying to create better habitats to help these birds as much as possible to help us keep on top of the slug populations.



## Centipedes / Black beetles

While these are small predators they account for a large number of small snails and slugs. A pile of stones or logs in the corner of your garden will create an environment which will encourage these creatures.

## Nematodes

Nematodes are microscopic creatures that seek out slugs and snails. The real benefit of Nematodes is that they kill slugs and snails in the soil and not just on the surface. They are usually most effective in the green house as they are sensitive to cold temperatures. They are also quite expensive when using them on large areas so this can be a little prohibitive.

## Other methods of slug and snail removal and control

**Slug Pellets** are a very popular method of slug and snail control but they are not for me as they are inclined to kill not only the target but other creatures as well. If you are determined to use them use only the hedgehog friendly types. After all we don't want to kill the very creatures that are helping us in our battle with slugs and snails. Timing of their use is important it is recommended that early spring is the best time to use them thus removing as many slugs and snails as possible before they breed and start the whole cycle again.

**Beer traps** appeal to me, being a method that does not cause me too much concern as the snails and slugs drink themselves to oblivion and if any other creature should come along and eat them there is no impact. The containers need to be quite shallow and would need to be emptied and refreshed on a regular basis to remain effective.



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**Garlic Water** I have trialled this method for the first time this year and have been very pleased with the result. One crushed clove of garlic put through the blender and mixed with a litre of water and sprayed on your plants. Time consuming but effective even with the field slug which can slither under other barriers that we put in place. Downside is that if it rains you have to spray again. However I did find as the season progressed I need to spray less and it was if the slugs had learned that it was no point in attacking this plant as it tasted of Garlic [ or maybe I am giving them too much credit].

**Coppers rings** I am not convinced by this method as I have seen slugs and snails just slip across them without a care in the world. Some people swear by them but for me there is a high cost involved which I find difficult to live with, plus the fact it is not effective with all slugs especially those that live in the soil - no barrier to them at all.

**Bucket and Torch Method** If you are brave enough, grab a torch and a bucket and when it gets dark get collecting. A lid for the bucket is helpful as they will try to leave your container as you collect them. A warm damp night is best. Then remove from the garden - I put mine in the middle of the moor [crows have a field day].



## Good gardening habits

Collect all unwanted plastic from around the garden and remove. Organise your compost bins and heaps into one corner of the plot in order to keep decaying matter away from your plants. Turn your soil over during the winter months to expose soil dwelling slugs to the mercy of the birds. This just a personal point. I see many gardeners putting down wood chippings as paths between their beds, which looks really neat and tidy. However to my mind this is a mistake as they are creating the perfect breeding habitat for slugs and snails, warm decaying matter and usually moist, just perfect. Encourage predators in your garden and above all, keep at them because they won't stop.