

***Cerņuella virgata* (Da Costa)**
(Mollusca: Helicidae)

Common white snail or Mediterranean white snail

(Not to be confused with another large, round, white snail - *Theba pisana*, white Italian snail)

Background

Common white snail originated in Europe. It arrived in South Australia around 1920 and is a significant pest problem in that State. It has spread to other parts of the southern mainland.

In the winter of 2007, there was an incursion of the common white snail into Tasmania. It arrived in imported feed grain and was found on 23 properties. Quarantine Tasmania conducted a baiting program and that appears to have eradicated it.

What does it look like?

It has a white shell often bearing brown, spiralled bands. It can grow to 20 mm in diameter but some mature at half that size. The snails begin life in the soil in clusters of milky white eggs each around 1 mm diameter.

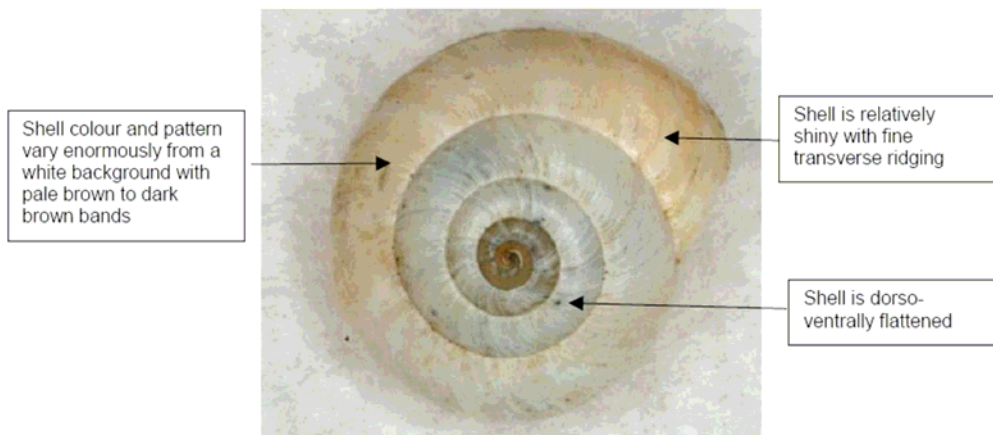


Figure 1 Top view of shell of common white snail.

Why is it a pest?

Common white snail is a pest of cereal crops and pastures, primarily because it can contaminate pasture and fodder. Stock reject pasture and hay that is heavily infested.

Although common white snail feeds primarily on decayed organic matter, it also eats seedlings of cereal, canola and pulse crops and clover in pasture. It has also been recorded feeding on native plants.

In Mediterranean countries, common white snail is known to be an intermediate host of several nematodes and trematode parasites (ie worms and flukes) of livestock.

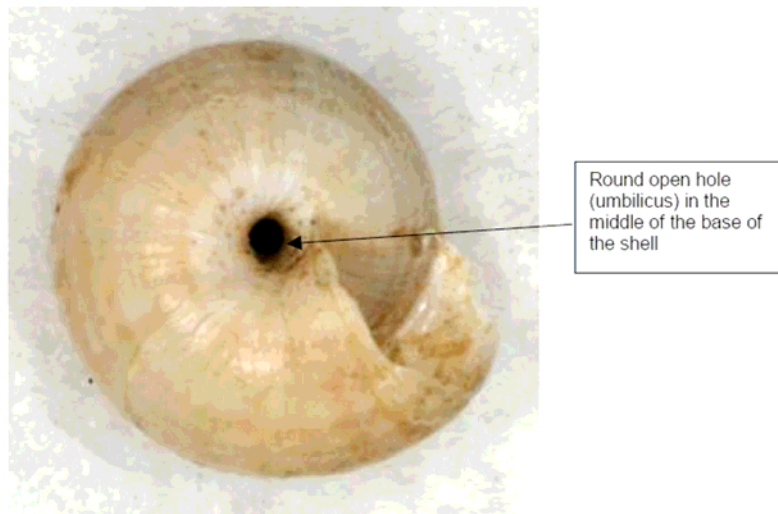


Figure 2 Bottom view of shell of common white snail.



Figure 3 Group of common white snails feeding on grass.

Where does it occur?

The common white snail is a major pest problem in South Australia, especially in the gulf districts, south-eastern coastal area and western plateau.

It is also found in Victoria's south-western coastal area, the Murray-Darling basin of three states and Western Australia's south-western coastal area and western plateau.

It was also once recorded in Portland, near Lithgow in New South Wales.

How does it spread ?

The greatest risk is feed grain imported from the mainland.

In late spring and early summer, the snails climb up fenceposts, cereal stems or anything else that enables them to get away from the heat of the soil surface. Many are harvested with the grain, hay etc and are then relocated when the grain or hay is fed out to livestock.

The common white snail is extending its range on the mainland, but this seems to be on a broad front from South Australia into Victoria rather than by way of many successful populations establishing remotely when the snail is carried in fodder. The evidence so far indicates that small and isolated populations are prone to local extinction.

Will it establish in Tasmania?

Current evidence indicates that, in broad terms, Tasmania's climate is too cool and our soils are too acid for the common white snail to survive in numbers sufficient to establish a viable population. However, as a precaution, it will remain a List A pest and farmers and anyone else handling imported feed grain should still report any sightings.

Good biosecurity

- Keep a constant watch for the snail in feed grain and on or near old feedout sites
- When feeding grain to livestock, have specific feedout sites rather than scattering the grain. Keep a record of where these feedout sites are so you can check them for snails next year

Reporting something that might be a common white snail

Report any sightings of the snail to Quarantine Tasmania on 1800 084 881. If in doubt, still report. There is no cost to farmers for Quarantine Tasmania to investigate a report.