The Roman Snail finial

By Charles King

The latest Finial in Coulsdon Art Trail and the last in Phase 2 is the Roman Snail which is prolific on Farthing Downs. The Roman Snail also known as the Burgundy snail is found in abundance on Farthing Downs belonging to the *Helicidae family* and native to Europe. The Roman Snail which is edible was brought to Britain during the Roman invasion some 2000 years ago by the Romans *(hence the name)* as part of their food stock for the invading army



Roman snails can be recognised by its globular brown shell five to six whorls, having a large shell (*up to 5cm across*) with a ridged texture Their Shells can be variable in colour and some can have more prominent markings than others which may be striped, but it never has a zigzag pattern. Roman snails are the only species that form a calcified white structure over the mouth of the shell during the winter called an epiphragm.

Roman snails are active from late April / May until October each year. Over the winter they hibernate and form a rigid calcium carbonate lid over the mouth of their shell. Their eggs are laid in June and July, in clutches of 40–65 eggs, their size is 5.5mm to 7.2 mm. Juveniles hatch after three to four weeks they reach maturity between two to five years. The life span is around 8 years, but can be up to 20 years. However, they often die sooner due to drying in summer and freezing in winter.



Romans snails require calcareous soils as they need to consume calcium carbonate to form their shell and it is for this reason that they have probably persisted in areas with an underlying calcareous geology such as the Chilterns and Farthing Downs. They need rough vegetation to provide shelter from predators and food.

Today the Roman Snail is protected Schedule 5 of The Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981. This legislation makes it an offence to : Intentionally kill, injure or take (*handle*) the species. Possess a live or dead Roman snail if it was taken from the wild. People have been prosecuted for removing them from Farthing Downs. More information can be found on **the Ecology web site** www.ecologybydesign.co.uk/ecology-resources/roman-snails-are-amongst-us

The latest Finial can be found on the Welcome to Coulsdon sign near in the Brighton Road Lion Green Road.