



Scientific Name:

Gibbula nivosus

English:

Maltese Top-shell

Maltese:

il-gibbula ta' Malta

The Maltese Top-shell, *Gibbula nivosus*, is a critically endangered marine snail, which is endemic to the Maltese Islands. This species is a small, attractively coloured, marine snail that was first described in 1851. Its size ranges between 3mm and 9mm. The shell is brown with white squares arranged in rows especially at the shell's rounded base, with fine brown lines descending on the spiral conical-shaped shell.

Although this species has been reported many times in various localities, it is rare and no live individuals were recorded between 1981 and 2006, despite intensive searches for the species in localities where it used to occur. Between 2006 and 2010, live individuals were recorded from a number of separate locations.

This species is typically found in shallow waters up to 5m in depth. Previous scientific research had identified the seagrass *Posidonia oceanica* as its main habitat. However, recent discoveries have indicated that cobble beds may be a more important habitat for this species.

The Maltese Top-shell is a nocturnal species, known to venture at night to forage for food and then return under stones during the day to evade predation.

Given the present distribution and localities of occurrence of the Maltese Top-shell, and its biology, the main threats and pressures faced by this species are those relating to habitat alteration or destruction. Noting this, *Gibbula nivosus* is considered as strictly protected through national, international and EU legislation, and a number of marine protected areas have been declared to protect this species and its habitats.



Photos credit: Julian Evans.