

Mamo's Door-snail - Dussies ta' Ghawdex

Muticaria macrostoma var. *mamotica* (Gulia, 1861)

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Introduction

The Mollusca are amongst the best known and probably easily recognizable group of invertebrates. This is mainly due to the fact that snails have long been studied by naturalists and their shapes and colours fascinated humans since prehistoric times. Apart from their aesthetic value many species are consumable. Because many species have been over-collected either as specimens for collections or for food many species have declined in numbers including some endemic species which may occur in a few square metres of area.

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The family Clausiliidae Morch, 1864 is considered as one of the largest families of terrestrial snails of

which four species with many different forms occur in the Maltese Islands. They are very difficult to spate from each other and three species, namely: *Lampedusa imitatrix* (Boettger, 1879), *L. melitensis* (Caruana-Gatto, 1892) and *Muticaria macrostoma* (Cantraine, 1835) are endemic to the Maltese Islands. The latter species is represented by four or five different forms. A unique form was described by Gulia in 1861 and this race is restricted to the Muxar promontory of *Il-Fekruna* or as it is known by the locals as *it-Toqba ta' Kristu*. This endemic form known to the scientific community as *Muticaria macrostoma* var. *mamotica* is considered as Endangered (Thake, 1989) and is also threatened by development.

Mamo's Door-snail is a terrestrial pulmonate snail with shell sinistral, medium-sized and light



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Mamo's Door-snail next to centimetre rule

yellowish-grey in colour. The external case is more or less closely ribbed with about 40 to over 200 ribs. Its preferred habitat is calcareous rocks, especially Coralline Limestone karstlands and *rdum*. Usually occurs in crevices and cavities in rocks and occasionally under vegetation growing in soil pockets. Also found in rubble walls surrounding cultivated as well as abandoned fields (Giusti *et al.*, 1995).

Giuseppe Mamo

Considered as the father of Maltese Conchology (Cachia, 1999), Giuseppe Mamo was in Agosta, Sicily in 1793 but was raised and educated in Malta. He carried out his studies at the Lyceum and the Royal University of Malta. He graduated as a chemist and during the plague of 1813 Mamo served in the Lazzaretto as the hospital's chemist. He also studied natural sciences and became an authority in conchology, geology, physics and analytic chemistry and archaeology. Giuseppe Mamo was nominated for the post of Professor of Natural Sciences at the University but due to his humble nature, he declined the offer. His passion for the mollusca led him to study the local species for 47 years. He built a large and important collection of some 438 different species from the Maltese islands. After his death this collection was bought by Sir William

Reid, Governor of Malta, and this was displayed at the Public library. Mamo was also a member of societies including the *Accademia Gioenai di Scienze Naturali* of Catania, in the *Cabinetto di Storia Naturale* in Syracuse and the *Società Medica d'Incoraggiamento* of Malta. Giuseppe Mamo died in 1865. Two years after his death, the Archaeological Society commissioned Dr. A.A. Caruana to prepare a report on Mamo's works and on the collection based mainly on Mamo's original notes. A report entitled *Enumeratio Ordinata Molluscorum gaulo-melitensium of the late G. Mamo* was published in 1867.

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