

1 **Urban *Cepaea nemoralis* snails are less likely to have**
2 **nematodes trapped within their shells**

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10 **Abstract**

11 Urbanization is a major human-induced environmental change which can impact not only
12 individual species, but also the way these species interact with each other. As a group, terrestrial
13 molluscs interact frequently with a wide diversity of parasites, yet the way these interactions vary
14 across space and in response to environmental pressures is poorly documented. In this study we
15 leveraged a recently discovered defence mechanism, by which snails trap parasitic nematodes in
16 their shells, to explore how snail-nematodes interactions may vary in response to city life. We
17 examined shells from the generalist snail *Cepaea nemoralis* sampled in three urban areas in
18 Belgium for trapped nematodes, and attempted to link this to urbanization and shell phenotypic
19 traits. We found that even a small degree of urbanization led to large decreases in the rates of
20 shell encapsulation, and that larger snails were more likely to contain trapped nematodes.
21 However, we found no evidence that shell colour, which had been previously linked to immune
22 function, was correlated to encapsulation rates. We discuss how between-population variation in
23 encapsulation rates can result from urbanization-induced changes on the nematodes side, the
24 snail side, or both, and suggest potential tests for future studies aiming to disentangle these
25 mechanisms.

26 **Key words:** Biotic interactions, Gastropoda, immunity, parasites.

27

28 Introduction

29 Urbanization is a major and all-encompassing human-induced environmental change, leading to
30 changes in land use, local climate, soil imperviousness, light and chemical pollution... (Parris,
31 2016). The (often negative) impacts of these multivariate changes on biodiversity are increasingly
32 well-documented: many species decline in cities, while some become successful “urban
33 adapters”, leading to major restructuring of biological communities along urbanization gradients
34 (e.g. McKinney, 2008; Piano et al., 2020; Fenoglio et al., 2020; Liang et al., 2023). In parallel,
35 urbanization can also cause within-species phenotypic and genetic changes (Alberti et al., 2017;
36 Szulkin et al., 2020; Diamond & Martin, 2021). Urbanization may also have second-order impacts
37 by reshaping ecological interactions, if tightly connected species respond to environmental
38 change in different ways (Theodorou, 2022). Such urbanization-induced changes in ecological
39 interactions, in both positive and negative directions, have been recorded for plant-pollinator
40 interactions (Liang et al., 2023), plant-herbivore and prey-predator interactions (Eötvös et al.,
41 2018; Valdés-Correcher et al., 2022; Gámez et al., 2022; Korányi et al., 2022), as well as host-
42 parasite interactions (Murray et al., 2019; Korányi et al., 2022).

43 Terrestrial molluscs (snails and slugs) are potentially valuable models in urban ecology and
44 evolution, in part because of their limited movement abilities, which means they often cannot
45 move to escape environmental changes. Like in many other taxa, urbanization can reshape
46 molluscan communities (Lososová et al., 2011; Horsák et al., 2013; Barbato et al., 2017; Hodges
47 & McKinney, 2018), and drive evolutionary responses in urban populations (Kerstes et al., 2019).
48 Interestingly, in a comparative cross-taxon study of urbanization impacts, snail species richness
49 were less negatively affected, compared to other more mobile groups (Piano et al., 2020). Land
50 molluscs are hosts to a diverse array of metazoan parasites, including nematodes, flies, mites or
51 trematodes (Barker, 2004; Segade et al., 2013; Żbikowska et al., 2020). How urbanization
52 reshapes these interactions remains understudied, despite some of these parasites being of
53 increasing veterinary interest (Aziz et al., 2016; Giannelli et al., 2016).

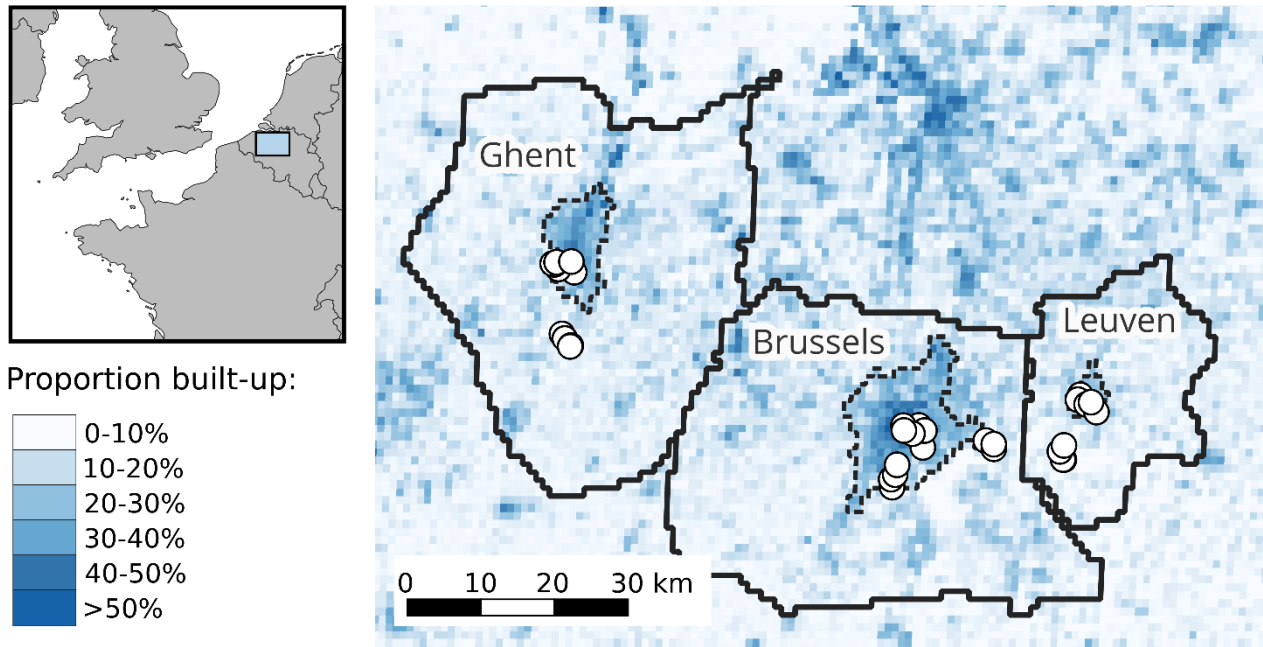
54 Snails and slugs can defend themselves against metazoan parasites through a variety of
55 behavioural (Wilson et al., 1999; Wynne et al., 2016; Rae, 2023) or immune responses (Furuta &
56 Yamaguchi, 2001; Scheil et al., 2014; Coaglio et al., 2018). Among the latter, it has been discovered
57 that land molluscs can use their shells to trap parasitic nematodes, killing them and fusing them
58 to the inner shell surface (Rae et al., 2008; Williams & Rae, 2015; Rae, 2017). This ability seems
59 phylogenetically widespread, even present in slugs with vestigial shells (Rae et al., 2008; Rae,
60 2017), and could therefore provide a relatively easy to access record of ecological interactions.
61 Following anecdotal records of mites and trematodes encapsulated in shells, it has further been
62 suggested that this shell encapsulation might extend to other metazoan parasites (Dahirel et al.,
63 2022; Gérard et al., 2023). However, given how rare these non-nematode records are, they may
64 be merely by-products of a defence mechanism targeted towards nematodes, rather than
65 evidence of a more generalized defence response (Gérard et al., 2023). The few snail species in
66 which this phenomenon has been studied across multiple populations show that the prevalence
67 of individuals trapping nematodes can vary widely between sites (Rae, 2017; Rae, 2018;
68 Cowlshaw et al., 2019), but there has been no attempt, to our knowledge, to assess whether this
69 variation could be non-random with respect to environmental context.

70 To that end, we combine here publicly available and standardized urbanization metrics with
71 observations of field-collected snails across three cities in Belgium, using the grove snail *Cepaea*
72 *nemoralis* (Gastropoda, family Helicidae) as a model. Like other helicids, *C. nemoralis* can
73 encapsulate and trap parasitic nematodes in its shell (Williams & Rae, 2016; Rae, 2017; Dahirel et
74 al., 2022; Gérard et al., 2023). This snail is also common both outside and within cities (Kerstes et
75 al., 2019), and therefore a very suitable model to study variation in encapsulation rates, whether
76 it is due to urbanization or to spatial (between-cities) differences. Furthermore, the shell colour
77 variation that made *Cepaea* species iconic models in evolutionary biology (Jones et al., 1977;
78 Özgo, 2009) may also influence their immune response, with some evidence that darker morphs
79 mount better defences against nematodes (Dahirel et al., 2022; but see Scheil et al., 2014). On
80 the other hand, this morph variation in resistance might not translate to shell encapsulation
81 (Williams & Rae, 2016; Dahirel et al., 2022). However, existing comparisons were either limited
82 to one type of colour variation (banding pattern only, Dahirel et al., 2022), or analysed
83 experimental infections by one model nematode (Williams & Rae, 2016); we here test whether
84 this remains true when analysing naturally occurring snail-nematode interactions and accounting
85 for more dimensions of shell colour variation.

86 **Methods**

87 **Site selection and sampling**

88 We searched for *Cepaea nemoralis* snails from early October to mid-November 2022 in and
89 around the urban areas of Brussels, Ghent and Leuven in Belgium (**Fig. 1**). Potential sites were
90 selected based on pre-existing online crowdsourced records (iNaturalist contributors &
91 iNaturalist, 2024) combined with personal observations and virtual fieldwork using Google
92 StreetView to identify suitable habitats (based on Falkner et al., 2001). We visited 36 sites chosen
93 to be roughly balanced between the three cities (including their surrounding areas; Brussels: 13
94 sites, Ghent: 13 sites, Leuven: 10 sites). In each site, we sampled living snails by hand during visual
95 search, in a radius of up to 50 m around a designated site centroid (though search was *de facto*
96 mostly concentrated within a 20 m radius). Individuals were mainly searched in known favourable
97 micro-habitats, i.e. on tall herbs and shrubs, under piled wood and cardboard or loose rocks, or
98 on fences, walls, and tree trunks (Falkner et al., 2001). Field identification of *Cepaea nemoralis*
99 snails is easy based on shell shape, size and colour (Cameron, 2008). We only collected adults,
100 which can easily be separated from subadults by the presence of a reflected shell lip marking the
101 end of shell growth (Cameron, 2008). Each site was visited by 1 to 3 people (mean: 2.03) for a
102 duration of 5 to 30 person-minutes (mean: 15). We collected a total of 298 snails from 28 of the
103 36 sites visited (Brussels: 9 sites, Ghent: 10 sites, Leuven: 9 sites). However, 2 shells were lost
104 before examination for parasites due to handling errors, and another shell was accidentally
105 broken for parasite examination before photographs or size measurements could be done; this
106 led to a final complete dataset of 295 snails in 28 sites. For each of these 28 sites, the nearest
107 neighbouring site with snails found was between 153 and 1516 m away (mean: 768 m), which is
108 in any case farther than the maximal dispersal distances (Kramarenko, 2014), indicating that even
109 nearby sites could be considered separate populations.



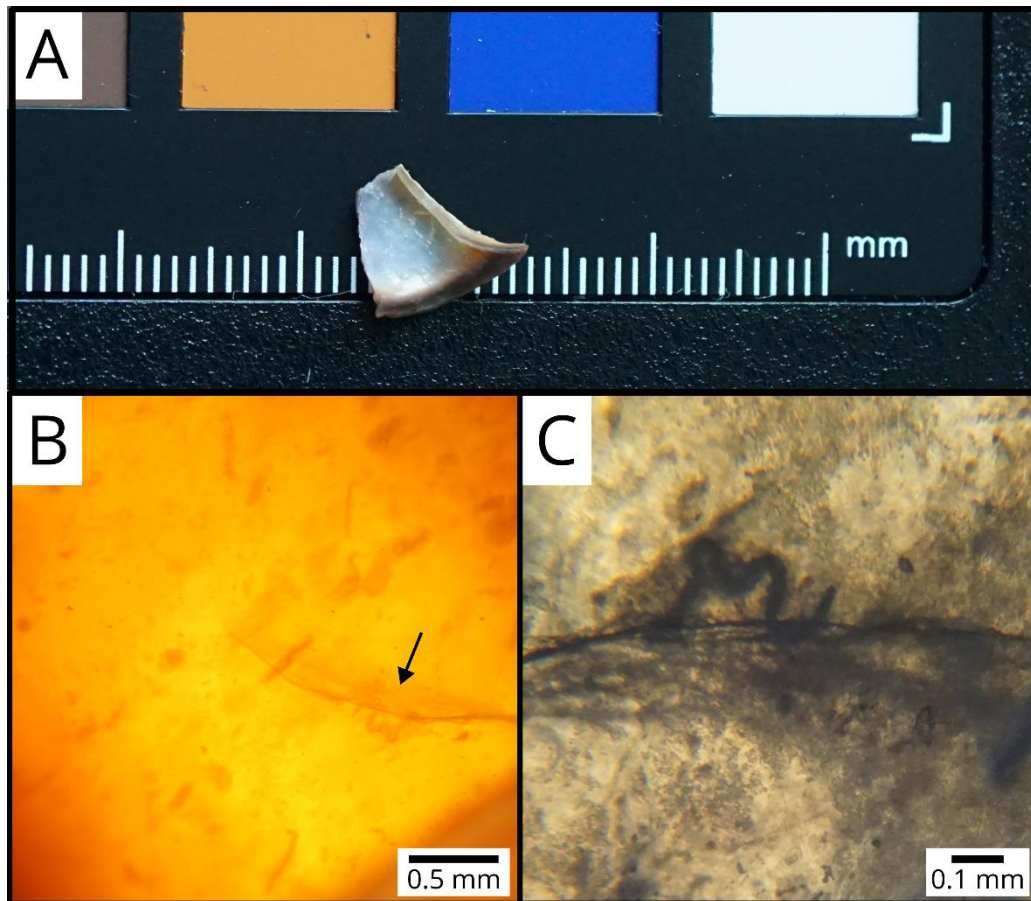
110
 111 **Figure 1.** Location of study sites within western Europe and central Belgium. The Functional Urban Areas
 112 (roughly corresponding to commuter zones, Schiavina et al., 2019; Moreno-Monroy et al., 2021)
 113 that were used to link each site to a city are also displayed as solid black lines, while the corresponding core urban
 114 areas (Urban Centres *sensu* Eurostat (European Commission), 2021; Schiavina, Melchiorri, et al., 2023)
 115 are displayed with dashed lines.

116 Urbanization metrics

117 It is well-known that urban environmental changes are complex and multivariate (e.g. Parris,
 118 2016); however, given our relatively low number of sites, and the risk of collinearity between
 119 urban metrics, we decided to use simple overarching metrics focused on building presence and
 120 human population density. We assessed urbanization at each site using raster layers from the
 121 Global Human Settlement Layer project for the year 2020 (<https://ghsl.jrc.ec.europa.eu/>, Joint
 122 Research Centre (European Commission), 2023). We first used built-up surface (GHS-BUILT-S) and
 123 population density (GHS-POP) at 100 m and 1000 m resolutions (Pesaresi & Politis, 2023;
 124 Schiavina, Freire, et al., 2023). The former spatial scale matches the scale of maximal dispersal
 125 movements over timespans of up to a couple years in helioid snails, while the latter is closer to
 126 the scale of longer term (over several decades) population spread (Kramarenko, 2014). As an
 127 additional categorical metric, we also used the Degree of Urbanization as recorded in the
 128 Settlement Model layer (GHS-SMOD, available only at 1000 m resolution, Eurostat (European
 129 Commission), 2021; Schiavina, Melchiorri, et al., 2023). At the highest level of classification, the
 130 standardized Degree of Urbanization methodology mainly uses population density and contiguity
 131 rules to classify grid cells as either part of a continuous high-density Urban Centre, as low-density
 132 rural cells or as intermediate peri-urban/suburban cells. For each site and urbanization metric,
 133 we recorded the value of the corresponding grid cell. Interestingly, Degree of Urbanization
 134 classes, primarily based on population density, divide our sites in almost the same non-linear way
 135 as another, independent, three-level classification based on built-up surfaces used in previous
 136 urban ecology studies in the study region (e.g. Piano et al., 2020) (**Supplementary Material S1**).

137 **Snail shell analysis**

138 Snail size was measured using a caliper as the shell greatest diameter (to the nearest 0.1 mm).
139 Snail shell colour morphs were scored following e.g. Cain (1988) for background colour (from
140 lighter to darker: yellow, pink or brown), number of dark bands (0 to 5 bands) and on the presence
141 or absence of band fusions (which increase the proportion of the shell covered by dark bands).
142 Snails were killed by first inducing dormancy at 6°C, then by freezing at -20°C. We removed bodies
143 from shells with forceps and lightly cleaned shells with water (bodies were stored in ethanol for
144 separately planned studies). We then broke each shell into fragments using forceps, examined
145 fragments under a binocular microscope, and recorded all animals found encapsulated within the
146 shell as in e.g. Gérard et al. (2023). A total of 606 nematodes were found in 104 shells (**Fig. 2**); we
147 found no mites, trematodes or other parasites in any of the shells. Shells with nematodes
148 contained 5.83 nematodes on average (SD: 9.95, range: 1-58). As this method is destructive, we
149 took standardised photographs of the shells beforehand (dorsal and apertural views following
150 Callomon, 2019) for archival and potential future studies.



151
152 **Figure 2.** Fragment of a *Cepaea nemoralis* shell (A) containing encapsulated nematodes (B, C). The arrow
153 in (B) points to the nematode shown in (C).

154

155 Statistical analysis

156 All analyses were done in R version 4.3.2 (R Core Team, 2023), with the help of the *tidyverse*
157 (Wickham et al., 2019) and *sf* (Pebesma, 2018) packages for data processing, as well as additional
158 packages detailed below for model fitting and exploration.

159 We analysed the probability a shell contained nematodes as a binary yes/no response at the
160 individual level, using Generalized Linear Mixed Models (GLMMs) (binomial family, logit link). We
161 ran six models; the first five all included shell size, shell morph traits (background colour, band
162 number and fusion), urbanization and city identity (Brussels, Ghent or Leuven) as fixed effects,
163 only differing by which urbanization metric they used (among the five described above in
164 **Urbanization metrics**). Given our sample size, we did not include interactions between our
165 explanatory variables, especially as we had no *a priori* hypotheses regarding these (but see
166 Discussion). Numeric predictors were centred and scaled to unit 1 SD. Sampling site was included
167 as a random intercept. The sixth model was a “null” model, identical to the other ones except
168 that it did not include an urbanization metric. We ran our models using the *glmmTMB* package
169 (Brooks et al., 2017), and then used AICc to compare them. As one model largely outperformed
170 the others (see **Results**), we did all further analyses on that best model.

171 We checked for residual spatial autocorrelation using a spline correlogram (*ncf* package,
172 Bjornstad, 2022), and found no evidence of spatial structure in the best model. We then used the
173 *car* (Fox & Weisberg, 2019) and *emmeans* (Lenth, 2023) packages to test for overall effects of our
174 variables in the best model and to run (Tukey-corrected) pairwise comparisons, respectively.
175 Finally, we estimated the marginal and conditional R^2 (Nakagawa & Schielzeth, 2013) as measures
176 of the proportion of variation explained by fixed effects (R_m^2) and both fixed and random effects
177 (R_c^2) respectively (using the delta method, Nakagawa et al., 2017).

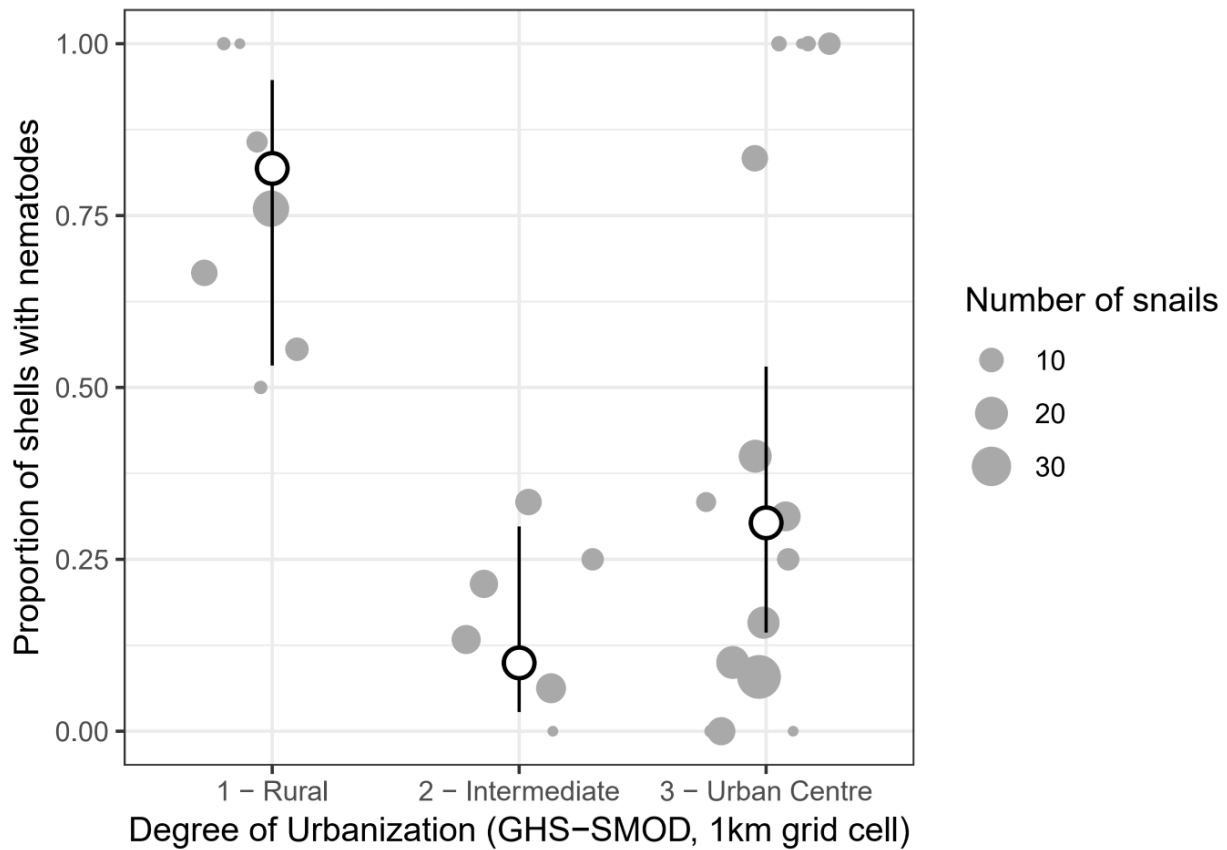
178 Results

179 The model using the categorical Degree of Urbanization (GHS-SMOD) as an urbanization metric
180 outperformed all other models based on AICc (**Table 1**). Fixed effects and random effects
181 explained similar amounts of variance ($R_m^2 = 0.19$; $R_c^2 = 0.38$). The probability that a shell had
182 trapped nematodes was dependent on urbanization level ($\chi^2 = 15.97$, $df = 2$, $p = 3.40 \times 10^{-4}$)
183 but did not vary significantly between cities ($\chi^2 = 3.89$, $df = 2$, $p = 0.14$). Snails from rural sites
184 were more likely to contain nematodes than snails from intermediate and Urban Centre
185 populations (**Fig. 3**; rural - intermediate difference on the logit scale \pm SE: 3.71 ± 0.95 ; rural -
186 Urban Centre difference: 2.34 ± 0.77). Larger shells were more likely to contain nematodes ($\chi^2 =$
187 4.17 , $df = 1$, $p = 0.04$; standardised coefficient $\beta = 0.35 \pm 0.17$). There was no clear evidence
188 that any of the shell colour traits affected encapsulation rates (background colour: $\chi^2 = 2.17$,
189 $df = 2$, $p = 0.34$; band number: $\chi^2 = 1.90$, $df = 1$, $p = 0.17$; fusion: $\chi^2 = 0.17$, $df = 1$, $p =$
190 0.68).

191

192 **Table 1.** Model selection table for the effect of urbanization on shell encapsulation rates. All models
 193 otherwise include effects of city identity, shell size and shell morph (background colour, number of bands
 194 and band fusion).

Urbanization variable in model	df	log-likelihood	AICc	Δ	AICc weight
Degree of Urbanization categories (SMOD, 1000 m resolution grid)	11	-149.5	322.0	0.00	0.95
None ("null" model)	9	-155.9	330.4	8.43	0.01
Population density (1000 m resolution grid)	10	-155.2	331.1	9.11	0.01
Built-up surface (1000 m resolution grid)	10	-155.4	331.5	9.49	0.01
Population density (100 m resolution grid)	10	-155.4	331.6	9.61	0.01
Built-up surface (100 m resolution grid)	10	-155.6	331.9	9.91	0.01



195 **Figure 3.** Effect of the Degree of Urbanization in 1000 m grid cells on the probability a snail shell contained
 196 encapsulated nematodes. Grey dots are observed proportions per population, with the size of the dot
 197 proportional to the number of snails; white dots (and error bars) are estimated marginal means from the
 198 best model (and their 95% confidence intervals), with the effects of the other predictors averaged out.
 199

200 Discussion

201 We found that the prevalence of *Cepaea nemoralis* snails encapsulating nematodes in their shell
202 as a defence mechanism were partly driven by environmental conditions, with lower trapping
203 rates in more urban sites (**Fig. 3**). This effect was better explained by a categorical classification
204 of the Degree of Urbanization, rather than by linear effects of continuous urbanization variables.
205 This indicates that the response to urbanization is non-linear, as the increases in population
206 density/built-up rates needed to go from a rural to an intermediate area are much smaller than
207 those needed to go from intermediate to Urban Centre, and most of the variation in density/built-
208 up is within Urban Centres rather than between categories (**Supplementary Material S1**).

209 A difficulty for interpreting our results is that nematodes trapped in shells accumulate with time
210 (Williams & Rae, 2015; Rae, 2017), meaning that as they may have endured more infections, older
211 snails may be more likely to have them. If the urban heat island influences snail survival rates
212 (Wolda, 1967, Manoli et al., 2019), then our urban-rural differences in nematodes trapped might
213 merely reflect differences in average snail age/survival. Age estimation in terrestrial snails is
214 challenging (Pollard et al., 1977; Williamson, 1979), and any age proxy is likely to be influenced
215 by local conditions, making it useless to compare age between populations without thorough
216 calibration studies. However, while there is substantial population variation, the number of
217 nematodes found in infected shells does not decrease in more urbanized sites (**Supplementary**
218 **Material S2**), contrary to what we would expect if variation in shell encapsulation was primarily
219 explained by variation in time available to accumulate nematodes.

220 If we assume that our results reflect differences in snail-nematodes interactions between urban
221 and non-urban areas, several mutually non-exclusive mechanisms may explain why urban *Cepaea*
222 *nemoralis* shells are less likely to trap nematodes. Each of these mechanisms directly suggests
223 potential tests for future studies:

- 224 • First, snail parasitic nematodes infecting *C. nemoralis* may be less abundant in cities. Many
225 nematodes known to infect land snails have at least one free-living life stage in the soil,
226 and some are facultative parasites (Morand et al., 2004; Pieterse et al., 2017). Increasingly
227 impervious substrates in cities (Parris, 2016) may deprive these of habitat critical for their
228 life cycle. Where habitat is available, soil nematode communities are profoundly altered
229 by urbanization, like other taxa (Li et al., 2022; Gong et al., 2024). However, this does not
230 lead to overarching declines in nematode abundance; rather, some trophic groups decline
231 while others thrive (Li et al., 2022; Gong et al., 2024). Unfortunately, detailed information
232 on nematodes parasitizing animals is typically lacking from these analyses; soil sampling
233 specifically targeting parasitic nematodes (Jaffuel et al., 2019) would be here particularly
234 useful. The few studies available are mixed on the effects of urbanization on the infection
235 of land molluscs by parasitic nematodes. In Wales, urban and suburban slugs are more,
236 not less, likely to be infected by *Angiostrongylus vasorum* compared to rural ones (Aziz et
237 al., 2016). By contrast, data from Andrus et al. (2022) spanning urban and non-urban sites
238 suggest that the prevalence of nematode infection may be slightly lower in urban
239 molluscs, although they did not themselves analyze the effect of urbanization. Both

240 studies however analyzed nematode prevalence in molluscs, not their
241 abundance/availability in the urban environment.

242 • Second, individual differences in behaviour, especially space-related behaviour, may lead
243 to differences in the risk of encountering and then being infected by parasites (Barber &
244 Dingemans, 2010). Habitat loss and fragmentation associated with urbanization are
245 expected to exert strong selection pressures on movement and space use (Cote et al.,
246 2017). If this results in lower movement in urban snail populations, this might then reduce
247 their encounter rates with parasites. In the snail *Cornu aspersum*, urbanization does not
248 lead to reduced habitat boundary-crossing behaviour (Dahirel et al., 2016), although that
249 is only one component of mobility. Urbanization-induced increases in temperature may
250 also alter the frequency at which snails hide into shelters or climb above the substrate
251 (Rosin et al., 2018), and potentially again the risk of encountering parasites. The picture is
252 complicated by behaviour-parasite feedbacks, where while host behaviour shapes
253 infection risk, infection can then alter host behaviour in turn (Ezenwa et al., 2016). In
254 *Cepaea nemoralis*, nematode infection itself might lead to reduced movement propensity,
255 but only in some morphs (Dahirel et al., 2022). More studies of movement behaviour
256 across urbanization gradients are here needed.

257 • Third, shell encapsulation rates are not direct records of snail-nematode interactions, but
258 rather informative on the host's ability to mount a defence in such interactions. This
259 defence is not always effective, as field-caught snails sometimes show active infections
260 but zero shell-trapped nematodes (see e.g. data in Dahirel et al., 2022). If immune
261 response declines with urbanization, then this alone could explain our results even in the
262 absence of changes in nematode communities. In vertebrates, urban living can lead to
263 both depressed or stimulated immune function, depending on taxon and context,
264 especially food availability (Murray et al., 2019; Minias, 2023). In terrestrial molluscs,
265 chemical pollutants seem to negatively impact many, but not all, physiological
266 components of immune defence (Radwan et al., 2020). The exact physiological pathways
267 involved in shell encapsulation in land molluscs remain however unstudied, to the best of
268 our knowledge.

269 Interestingly, nematode encapsulation prevalence was seemingly more variable between Urban
270 Centre populations than between populations in the other urban categories (Fig. 3). While this
271 may merely be due to some populations having low sample size, this suggests that there may be
272 within-city variability in snail-nematode interactions that are not explained by built-up levels or
273 population density. Cities are indeed highly heterogeneous environments, and within-city
274 variation in vegetation, mediated in part by neighborhood-level socio-economic differences, may
275 shape biodiversity, including species interactions (e.g. Martin et al., 2024). Our ability to detect
276 within-city patterns is here hampered by our small number of sites per Urban Centre; future
277 studies focused on this within-city heterogeneity may uncover more on the fine-scale drivers of
278 snail responses to parasites.

279 On the individual phenotype side, larger shells were more likely to contain trapped nematodes. If
280 shell size also varied in response to urbanization, then this could open an indirect pathway linking

281 urbanization to encapsulation mediated by snail size, potentially accentuating or dampening the
282 direct effect we describe above. However, we found no clear effect of urbanization on *C.*
283 *nemoralis* shell size (**Supplementary Material S3**). In addition and as a post-hoc exploration, we
284 re-ran our model set adding size × urbanization interactions, and found no significant interaction,
285 and no evidence that the urbanization effect changed in response (Supplementary Material S4).
286 The relationship between size and nematode encapsulation could be the result of survivor bias
287 alone, if larger snails are more likely to survive infection. However, and although we cannot
288 exclude that other nematodes have larger effects, experimental nematode infections by
289 *Phasmarhabditis* are almost never lethal in adult *Cepaea nemoralis*, contrary to other snail
290 species (Wilson et al., 2000; Williams & Rae, 2016). Other potential explanations for this result
291 can be sorted along three non-exclusive lines, similar to the mechanisms suggested above to
292 explain the effect of urbanization:

- 293 • Larger snails might harbour larger parasite infections (e.g. Daniels et al., 2013), which
294 would increase the likelihood that some nematodes are trapped. However, there is no link
295 between nematode abundance in active infections and snail size in *C. nemoralis* (Dahirel
296 et al., 2022), and no clear effect of shell size on the number of nematodes trapped in the
297 present study (**Supplementary Material S2**).
- 298 • If large and small snails differ in their space use, they might also differ in their parasite
299 exposure risk. Evidence for a link between shell size and space use is mixed in *Cepaea*
300 *nemoralis*, and this may depend on the scale of the movements in question (short-term
301 routine vs. dispersal movements; Oosterhoff, 1977; Dahirel et al., 2022).
- 302 • Finally, small and large snails may differ in their immune defence abilities. Comparative
303 studies suggest that large and small snail species and subspecies differ in their immune
304 strategies at the physiological level (Russo & Madec, 2011, 2013). However, the range of
305 body size and life history variation is much larger in these scenarios than among adults of
306 *C. nemoralis*, limiting the transferability of these results. More physiological studies
307 focused on within-, rather than among-species variation may help understand better this
308 link between body size and encapsulation rates.

309 In contrast to shell size, we found no relationship between any of the shell colour traits and
310 nematode trapping rate. This confirms experimental results from Williams & Rae (2016) using
311 infections by *Phasmarhabditis hermaphrodita*. However, colour morphs do differ in active
312 infection rates or other aspects of immune response in *C. nemoralis* (Dahirel et al., 2022) and
313 other polymorphic snails (Scheil et al., 2013, 2014). This discrepancy may indicate that shell
314 encapsulation is driven by different physiological pathways than other components of snail
315 immune defence.

316 Beyond the effects of phenotype or environment, whether and how the prevalence of nematodes
317 trapped in shells is correlated with rates of active parasite infections remains an open and
318 complex question (which we could not tackle here as snail bodies were reserved for other
319 investigations). If variation in snail-nematode interactions is driven by e.g. variation in nematode
320 density in the environment, we may expect a positive correlation, as higher nematode densities
321 should drive up rates of both shell encapsulation (Rae, 2018) and active infection (although if

322 encapsulation is highly effective, it may end up suppressing dose-dependent effects on active
323 infection, Williams & Rae, 2015). On the other hand, if variation is mostly driven by snail immune
324 response, we may expect a negative correlation: snails with more effective immune systems may
325 be more likely to successfully trap nematodes in shells while being less likely to harbour active
326 infections. While this would need to be validated, the strength and direction of between- and
327 within-sites correlations between active infections and shell-trapped nematodes may provide
328 useful indicators of the main drivers of snail-nematodes interactions in response to city life.

329 We acknowledge that the relatively small size of our sample does not allow us to draw firm causal
330 conclusions. Nonetheless, we hope our results may encourage larger studies regarding host-
331 parasite interactions in land molluscs in the context of environmental change. As new technical
332 developments such as micro-CT imaging allow non-destructive analyses of snail shells
333 (Falkingham & Rae, 2021), these may extend to using museum and other natural history
334 collections to understand how interactions vary in space and time (Cowlshaw et al., 2019),
335 reaffirming their value for urban ecology and evolution (Shultz et al., 2020).

336 **Author contributions**

337 Initial study idea: MD, DB. Site selection and fieldwork: MD, HR, KDW. Shell data collection: HR,
338 after initial training by MD. Data analysis: MD, after preliminary analyses by HR. Initial manuscript
339 draft: MD. All authors contributed critically to edits and gave final approval for publication.

340 **Funding**

341 This study has received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation
342 programme under the Marie Skłodowska-Curie grant agreement No 101022802 (HELICITY). KDW
343 and DB received funding from the Fund for Scientific Research Flanders (grant G080221N).

344 **Conflict of interest disclosure**

345 The authors declare they have no financial conflict of interest in relation with the content of this
346 article. DB is a recommender for PCI Ecology and PCI Evolutionary Biology.

347 **Data and code availability**

348 Data and R scripts to reproduce all analyses presented in this article, as well as a copy of the
349 Supplementary Materials, are available on Github ([https://github.com/mdahirel/HELICITY-
350 2022_shell-nematodes](https://github.com/mdahirel/HELICITY-2022_shell-nematodes)) and archived in Zenodo (DOI:
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352 **References**

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