

THE CONCHOLOGISTS' NEWSLETTER

No. 1

Compiled by: M. Goodchild

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INTRODUCTION

It has been felt for some time by members of Council that some means should be provided to help new members and beginners to conchology, to put members in touch with each other and to circulate notes and observations of interest and value.

In an endeavour to fulfil these needs, the Council is producing this NEWSLETTER for contributions not intended for permanent record. It is hoped to provide introductory articles suitable for beginners; notes on techniques; articles relating to the history of conchology; reports on current conchological progress; book reviews; reports and notices of the Society's field meetings and of the talks at indoor meetings. Collectors' experiences, such as the one appearing below, can be of much interest, even if written by people who do not consider themselves scientifically minded.

It is also hoped to advertise collectors' requirements in books or specimens and requests for correspondents or exchange material. It may, later, be necessary to charge a small fee for such insertions.

It is intended to circulate the NEWSLETTER without charge to members. Its success and frequency of issue will depend on your support and your written contributions are cordially invited. They should be sent to Mr. M. Goodchild, to whom the Council expresses their grateful thanks for kindly undertaking the compilation of the Newsletter.

The JOURNAL OF CONCHOLOGY will, of course, continue to be the Society's scientific publication. THE CONCHOLOGICAL NEWSLETTER SHOULD NOT BE REGARDED AS A SCIENTIFIC PUBLICATION FOR BIBLIOGRAPHIC PURPOSES.

C. P. CASTELL,
T. E. CROWLEY,

PRESIDENT.
HON. SECRETARY.

Collecting East African Marine Shells

by E. Robson, M.P.S., Ph. C., Nairobi

The best way to tell you about our coast is to take you with me, out to the Reef. There are many inexpensive "beach-cottage-hotels" available along the coast-line of Kenya where we can wait until the tide begins to uncover the reef. This is only half a mile away, and we could go out by canoe, but the best way is to be independent and to wade and swim out in tennis shoes, an old pair of pyjamas over a swim suit, and a beret or an old waterpolo cap. The equipment needed is a knife, a hooked rod for pulling over lumps of coral, a nylon mesh bag which hangs from a waist belt, a sponge bag for the smaller specimens, and snorkel and goggles for under-water hunting.

Octopus abound but are not large enough to hurt you; your only dangers are sea-urchin spikes and the stone-fish (which is very rare and need not deter you). Sting rays will flee and eels will attack only if provoked. Sharks on the far side of the reef are often curious, but they are also nervous and leave one well alone.

The first shells to be found are the Cassis rufus or helmet shells lying in the pools or on the reef. Under water, each knob on the periphery shines up, reflecting different shades of yellow, red and purple, and this helps you to spot them. As you get your 'eye in', you begin to find specimens of the Lambis genus, first the huge ones and then the smaller kinds. Others which come without much trouble include Strombus aureus, Thais, Clanculus, Gemmicula the 'strawberry shell', topshells (Turbinellidae) and several Cones including C. textile, geographus, litteratus, betulinus, virgo, and many others only slightly rarer. A fair selection of Olives, Haliotis, Murex, Tun-shells, and

two varieties at least of the beautiful Harp shells are soon found. One soon becomes very choosy and selects only first-class specimens, especially as they all have to be carried several miles along the reef preparatory to a swim to shore.

The cowries you will usually find underneath the coral lumps, which have to be turned over for the purpose. Under red coral you may find Cypraea cribraria cribraria, the other sub-species C. c. teres, and C. chinensis, all of which have scarlet animals. C. stolidus is very rare here, in fact I have found only one to date; C. argus (the pheasant), C. punctata and C. testudinaria (the tortoise), also need a long search. On the other hand you would be unlucky if on your first day you could not find C. moneta, C. annulus, C. helveola, (the star cowrie), C. lynx, C. carneolus, C. vitellus, and C. tigrinus; less common are C. scurra, C. mauritiana, and C. erronea. We have in all about forty five known cowries, all of which I have found at one time or another. I should mention in this connection that my children are all expert swimmers and we stay in the water for hours at a time - the temperature is usually about 80° F - so that we have everything in our favour for collecting. Naturally, all the specimens are in beautiful condition and make a brilliant display in a collection. Until one has seen perfect specimens in their natural habitat, or has access to an unusually fine museum, it is difficult to appreciate fully what these fine shells can and should look like.

I find that many experts, who know far more about shells than I do, boil or soak their cowries instead of allowing flies to breed maggots in them to rot the flesh. The shell should be left in the shade for a day or two, when the flies will have laid their eggs. The shells should then be put in tins with layers of sand and taped up for two or three weeks. In the tropics this system is easy and perfect, and when the tins are opened (with averted nostrils), and the shells are washed under a garden tap, they will be found perfectly clean. The Cassis, Lambis and similar genera also respond to this treatment, which leaves the brilliant surface in perfect condition, but cones and top-shells are different and you have to be careful to rot them thoroughly.

Lambis panellis and the Tritons are two of the most showy of our shells. The former can grow to ten inches in length, and the Triton, one of the most beautifully coloured and patterned shells in the world, will grow to eighteen inches and more.

The currents and the fresh water springs have a lot to do with the reef life and each mile of coastal reef seems different from the next; a poor reef often lies next to a good one, and the time of month and state of the tides are important in timing your visit. Zanzibar is a good area, but most of the specimens are found in shallow water at low tide; the lovely reefs at Mombasa are the finest of all, and these have furnished most of the shells in my collection.

OYSTER-CATCHERS FEEDING ON PATELLA VULGATA by G. W. Pitchford

Walking along Torquay Road, Torquay, S. Devon in the vicinity of Corbyn Head on the evening of 26th. July 1958, in company with my wife and daughter, I looked over the cliff wall to the Livermead Sands and saw seven Haemotopus ostralegus (Oyster-catchers) running about the low flat topped sandstone rocks below. A little weed and a fair number of Patella vulgata could be seen attached to the sides of the rocks, which were divided by narrow gulleys. The birds were either in pairs or singly, and their antics seemed comical to watch.

The rock nearest to us was occupied by a single Oyster-catcher, the bird would run across the rock wagging its head and making a rather low guttural call like 'Kleep Kleep'. Near the edge of the rock the bird would stop abruptly, turn and run in the opposite direction, then when near the edge of the rock it would again stop abruptly, and with a quick thrust of its beak would knock a limpet into the shallow water. It was quickly retrieved and carried apex downwards and placed on the rock. The bird would then secure the mollusc with its left foot, and proceed to peck the limpet from its shell. The operation of devouring the mollusc was quickly accomplished, when the bird would start its antics again. We saw the birds secure a good number of Patella in this way.

FIELD MEETING HELD NOVEMBER 27th. 1960

Five members attended the excursion to Box Hill, Surrey. They were extremely relieved to find that the water level of the River Mole, after the recent flood, was quite low, and none of the areas in which they wanted to collect were under water.

Field collecting was carried out in the following localities:-

- (1) Along the wooded west bank of the River Mole, just to the north of the stepping stones (51/174515). Molluscs were found in areas of leaf litter and ivy which covered the ground.
- (2) At the foot of the steep chalk escarpment, where the dense Dogwood scrub changes to grassland, and in a deep crater-like depression (51/175516) nearby. In the Dogwood all the snails and slugs were collected from the ground surface, which consisted of a broken layer of chalk chips covered with mosses; adjoining this was an expanse of grassland with a small overgrown ditch, in which Azeca goodalli occurred with other species more characteristic of grassland. At the bottom of the crater there were a large number of logs scattered amongst the leaf litter.
- (3) Our final collecting locality was on the downs at the top of the escarpment, just below Salomon's memorial (51/178514). Here the majority of specimens were taken at the base of the grass stems and in the moss layer.

The table below records the distribution of the molluscan species found on this excursion:- (see next page)

The important features of this table are the high relative abundance of species of slugs (20%) and Zonitidae (21%), and the absence of living specimens of the large helicids, which would have been hibernating. J.F.P.

BRIEF NOTES

1. The attention of Members is drawn to the list of available publications on the back cover of the Journal. The Winckworth List of British Marine Mollusca is now offered at 2s. 6d. and the addendum, reprinted from the Journal, Vol. 23, No. 5, which brings the list up to date, is now available at 2s. 3d. (Less member's discount in each case).
2. Among books recently written by members is 'Orkney Shore' by Robert Rendall, which deals with local nature records and biographical notes on Orkney marine naturalists.
3. Any members interested in the marine mollusca of South Africa would be well advised to consider joining the Conchological Society of South Africa. Details are available from Mr. D. H. Kennelly, [REDACTED]. The Society issues at intervals a most attractive and well-produced circular to members.
4. A certificate of Proficiency in Natural History is available through the University of London. This involves a directed course of private reading at home, attendance at a practical course at a Field Centre and an approved plan of fieldwork. It is designed both for teachers and for anybody interested in the study of living things.

Details are available from the Secretary, Natural History Certificate Course, Department of Extra-Mural Studies, University of London, Senate House, W.C.1.
5. The following gentleman writes that he has for sale a large variety of Australian shells with localities and names; lists will be sent on application. Prof. B. Kaspiew, [REDACTED]
6. One of our members, Miss A. M. Saunders, [REDACTED] is the possessor of a museum of shells and corals, which she opens to the public in aid of handicapped people. The display includes some remarkable specimens, and all members are recommended to pay it a visit when in the locality.
7. English marine and non-marine mollusca are requested by Ing. Giuseppe [REDACTED] in exchange for Italian specimens.

<u>SPECIES</u>	<u>LOCALITY</u>			<u>SPECIES</u>	<u>LOCALITY</u>		
	1	2	3		1	2	3
<i>Pomatias elegans</i> (Müller)		D		<i>Carychium tridentatum</i> (Risso)		L	
<i>Succinea pfeifferi</i> Rossmässler		D		<i>Azeca goodalli</i> (Ferussac)		L	
<i>Cochlicopa lubricella</i>		D	D	<i>Pupilla muscorum</i> (L.)		D	L
<i>Vallonia costata</i> (Müller)		L	L	<i>Ena obscura</i> (Müller)		D	
<i>Marpessa laminata</i> (Montagu)		D		<i>Clausilia bidentata</i> (Ström)		D	
<i>Ceciliodes acicula</i> (Müller)			D	<i>Arianta arbustorum</i> (L.)		D	
<i>Helix hortensis</i> Müller			D	<i>H. nemoralis</i> L.		D	D
<i>Hygromia striolata</i> (C. Pfeiffer)		L		<i>H. hispida</i> (L.)		L	
<i>Monacha cantiana</i> (Montagu)		D	L	<i>Helicella caperata</i> (Montagu)			L
<i>H. virgata</i> (da Costa)			L	<i>H. itala</i> (L.)			L
<i>Punctum pygmaeum</i> (Draparnaud)		L		<i>Discus rotundatus</i> (Müller)		L	L D
<i>Arion intermedius</i> Normand		L		<i>Arion circumscriptus</i> Johnston		L	
<i>Arion hortensis</i> Ferussac		L		<i>Arion ater</i> (L.)		L	
<i>Euconulus fulvus</i> (Müller)		L		<i>Vitrea cf. contracta</i> (Westerlund)		D	D
<i>Oxychilus cellarius</i> (Müller)		L		<i>O. alliarius</i> (Miller)		L	
<i>O. helveticus</i> (Blum)		L	L	<i>Retinella radiatula</i> (L. Pfeiffer)		L	
<i>R. pura</i> (Alder)		L		<i>R. nitidula</i> (Draparnaud)		L	L
<i>Vitrina pellucida</i> (Müller)		L	L	<i>Milax budapestensis</i> (Hazay)		L	
<i>Limax maximus</i> L.		L		<i>Agriolimax reticulatus</i> (Müller)		L	L L

KEY: L = Living specimens, D = Dead shells

EDITORIAL NOTE: M. Goodchild

This is the first issue of the "C.N." - a sort of specimen copy. Now it is up to you readers. It is hoped to get contributions from people whose names do not normally appear in the "J.C.", but who have news to communicate. Any comments and suggested inclusions are welcomed. Proposed articles include a series on famous collectors, introductions to different genera (exotic and British) and an account of an unusually productive garden, the last by a non-member. The next issue is planned for late summer and is hoped to be twice the size of this issue, so please take up your pens and start writing!