



# SHELL•O•GRAM

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**JACKSONVILLE SHELL CLUB, INC.**

**September-October, 2001**

**Volume 42(5)**

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**Harry Lee, Secretary**  
**Teresa St. John, Treasurer**

## **September Meeting**

The September 27<sup>th</sup> meeting of the Jacksonville Shell Club will be held at the Southeast Branch Public Library at 7:00 PM.

The educational program will be presented by Nellie Hawley who will discuss her collecting activities in and around the Visayan Sea, central Philippines, conducted in May of this year.

The Shell-Of-The-Month will be given by Harry Lee on *Cypraea aurantium* Gmelin, 1791 – the Golden Cowrie.

Election of 2001-2002 club officers will also be held (see page 2 for more information).

## **October Meeting**

The October 25<sup>th</sup> meeting of the Jacksonville Shell Club will be held at the usual time and location.

The meeting will feature a presentation by Joe Sasser on the application of conchology to the study of archaeology - particularly that relating to the early inhabitants of our part of the world. Joe is a retired professor of anthropology at FCCJ and has several years of hands-on experience in the field.

The Shell-Of-The-Month will be a surprise!  
Plan now to attend and bring a guest!

## **The Jacksonville Shell Club's 35<sup>th</sup> Shell Show**

Under the leadership of Carol Rishel, the Jacksonville Shell Club held its 35<sup>th</sup> Shell Show at the Brampton Inn Resort in Jacksonville Beach on Saturday, July 14<sup>th</sup> and Sunday, July 15<sup>th</sup>.

This year's awards banquet, organized by Billie and Paul Brown, was held at the Fraternal Order of Police (FOP) Lodge in Jacksonville Beach and featured a catered barbeque buffet, an oral auction of 26 lots (handled by Harry Lee and Charlotte Lloyd), and an after dinner speech by noted British author S. Peter Dance. Peter, who was in the United States on business and visited the shell show all weekend, had previously spoken at the Conchologists of America Convention in Port Canaveral earlier in the week. To quench the thirst of the attendees, Charlotte mixed up a tub of her famous (and potent) "Fishhouse Punch."

Thanks to the planning and organizational abilities of George Hapsis (Scientific Chairman) and Rob and D.D. Jewel (Artistic Co-chairpersons), this year's show contained a total of 352 linear feet of displays. This included 288 linear feet of scientific displays (25 exhibits from 13 exhibitors) and 64 linear feet of craft displays (42 exhibits from 16 exhibitors). The display area also included six dealers and the Sand Flea Market. Because of space constraints, some last minute scientific entries had to be turned away.

While entries this year were prolific and of very high quality, public attendance at the show (as measured by paying guests) was the lowest it has been in many years with only 427 over the two day period. This was down significantly from the 641 paying guests at the same venue last year and 575 guests in 1999. While many visitors opted not to pay the requested \$3.00 donation at the door, no records were kept as to their exact numbers.

The Jacksonville Shell Club owes a debt of gratitude to all the exhibitors who made the show possible – specifically our out-of-town group. That list includes Leslie Crnkovic (Houston), Jim Cordy (Merritt Island), Ann Joffee (Sanibel), Bob & Alice Pace and Fay Mucha (Miami), and last but not least, Alice Monroe (Clearwater). ((Continued on page 3.))



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The **Shell-O-Gram** is issued bimonthly and mailed to all regular members. Annual membership dues are \$12.50 individual and \$15.00 family (domestic), and \$20.00 (foreign). Lifetime membership is available.

Send dues to: Teresa St. John, Treasurer  
2605 Emily Court  
Jacksonville, FL 32216-5101

The club meets each month, excluding December, at the Southeast Branch Public Library, 10599 Deerwood Park Boulevard, Jacksonville Florida. Please address any correspondence to the club's address shown above.

Closing date for article submission is two weeks prior to the first of each month of publication. Articles may be republished provided full credit is given the author and this newsletter and one copy of the complete publication in which the article appears is mailed to Editor at the above address.

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### **It's That Time Again Membership Dues Are Now Due**

Jacksonville Shell Club membership dues for club fiscal year 2002 were due for a vast majority of club members on September 1st.

You can determine when your membership expires (or when it expired) by checking the numerical entry that appears before your name on your newsletter mailing label. An entry of "8/01" would indicate that your membership expired on the last day of August, 2001.

Don't delay – mail your check to the Club Treasurer, Teresa St. John, whose address appears on this page.

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### **Meeting Notes**

At the August 23<sup>rd</sup> meeting, the club membership selected the trio of Bill Frank, Billie Brown and Cathy Williams as the nominating committee to provide a slate

of proposed Board of Directors for the upcoming club fiscal year.

The nominating committee will submit their proposed slate to the membership at the September meeting. Additional nominations will also be accepted from the floor. Following this action, the membership will vote on the new Board of Directors for the 2002 fiscal year, that began on September 1st.

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### **Club Field Trip To Panacea**

The Jacksonville Shell Club will have a shell collecting field trip to Panacea/Carrabelle in the Florida Panhandle south of Tallahassee, on Friday, October 5<sup>th</sup> through Sunday, October 7<sup>th</sup>. Headquarters for the trip will be the Oaks Motel just south of Panacea.

For additional information and directions, contact Selma Hutchison (1-904-794-4586) or Bill Lyerly (771-5632 – E-mail [Bllyerly@AOL.Com](mailto:Bllyerly@AOL.Com)). If you are planning on participating, you should call the Oaks Motel (1-850-984-5370) as soon as possible and make your room reservations.

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### **Club Field Trip to Sanibel**

Mark your calendar – March 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup>. These are the dates for the Sanibel Island Shell Fair and we are planning a field trip for our club members to attend.

A motel has been located just off the island, which has offered rates of \$92.00 for a double and \$84.00 single, if we reserve at least five rooms. We should take advantage of this offer, as it is very reasonable for the winter season.

Present plans are to stay Friday and Saturday nights, and expect to visit not only the Shell Fair, but also the Bailey-Matthews Shell Museum. Of course, there will be time for shelling and shopping. If you plan to go, contact Bill Lyerly via phone (771-5632) or E-mail ([Bllyerly@AOL.Com](mailto:Bllyerly@AOL.Com)).

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### **Welcome New Members**

Gary D. Gordon & Family  
112 Tina Drive  
Warner Robins, GA 31088  
Phone: (912) 922-4642

John & Mary Wade  
11247 San Jose Blvd. #1515  
Jacksonville, FL 32217  
Phone: 880-7377

E-mail: [mwade78082@aol.com](mailto:mwade78082@aol.com)

Dr. Lisa Davis  
4007 Marianna Road  
Jacksonville, FL 32217  
Phone: 367-0939  
E-mail: [lisadavis3@visto.com](mailto:lisadavis3@visto.com)

Edward & Cheryl Buck  
11649 Brush Ridge Circle South  
Jacksonville, FL 32225  
Phone: 997-1088

Marie Ignacio & Family  
8548 Colony Pine Circle West  
Jacksonville, FL 32244  
Phone: 215-3277  
E-mail: [randmimports@aol.com](mailto:randmimports@aol.com)

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### 35<sup>th</sup> Shell Show - continued

Of course you can't have a shell show without hospitality (a.k.a. food). Once again Billie and Paul Brown generously opened up their home and provided lunch on both Saturday and Sunday. To at least one of us (and his spouse), this ranks among the highlights of the show. It should also be noted that Paul, the former Chief of Police of Jacksonville Beach, was able to arrange for use of the FOP Lodge by the club at no cost.

Staging a yearly shell show requires considerable work by club members and the investment of a significant portion of the club treasury (about \$4,500 in recent years). Therefore, the burning question most members have is "Did we make any money?" While not all the accounting has been completed, Club Treasurer Teresa St. John reports that the club realized a modest profit of about \$500 – good news considering the drop-off in paid attendance.

**Note:** This article, accompanied by color images, can be found on the club web pages at:

[www.jaxshells.org/35shellshow.htm](http://www.jaxshells.org/35shellshow.htm).

### Shell Show Winners

#### (Scientific Categories)

#### A-1-2 World-Wide

1<sup>st</sup> - Ray Wichus (Central Florida Shell Club)

#### A-1-4 Florida and Caribbean

1<sup>st</sup> - Bob & Alice Pace (Greater Miami Shell Club)

#### A-1-5 Self-Collected Southeast United States and Caribbean

1<sup>st</sup> - Jim Cordy (Astronaut Trail Shell Club)

#### A-1-6 Self-Collected Worldwide

2<sup>nd</sup> - Pamela Rice (Jacksonville)

#### A-1-8 One Major Family

1<sup>st</sup> - Teresa St. John (Jacksonville)

#### A-1-9 One Minor Family

2<sup>nd</sup> - Mary Reynolds (Jacksonville)

#### A-1-10 One Genus

1<sup>st</sup> - Fay Mucha (Greater Miami Shell Club)

2<sup>nd</sup> - Bill Frank (Jacksonville)

3<sup>rd</sup> - Alice Monroe (Suncoast Conchologists)

#### A-1-11 One Single Specimen

1<sup>st</sup> - Rob & Alice Pace - *Vasum latiriforme* Rehder & Abbott, 1951

2<sup>nd</sup> - Ray Wichus - *Conus elisae* Kiener, 1845

3<sup>rd</sup> - Jim Cordy - *Festilyria duponti* Weaver, 1968

#### A-1-12 Educational

1<sup>st</sup> - Alice Monroe

2<sup>nd</sup> - Nellie Hawley (Jacksonville)

#### A-1-13 Rare

1<sup>st</sup> - Leslie Crnkovic (Houston, TX)

#### A-1-14 Oddities

1<sup>st</sup> - Harry Lee (Jacksonville)

2<sup>nd</sup> - Fay Mucha

#### A-1-16 Related Specialty

1<sup>st</sup> - Leslie Crnkovic

2<sup>nd</sup> - Judy Blocker (Jacksonville)

#### A-1-18 Sea Life

1<sup>st</sup> - Pamela Rice

#### Division A-2 Non-Marine Mollusks

1<sup>st</sup> - Mary Reynolds

1<sup>st</sup> - Bob & Alice Pace

#### Division A-3 Marine Fossils

1<sup>st</sup> - Leslie Crnkovic

2<sup>nd</sup> - Mary R. Reynolds

**Dupont Trophy** – Bob & Alice Pace “Florida/Caribbean Rare Shells”

**Conchologists Of America Award** – Alice Monroe  
“The Genus *Strombus* In The Caribbean”

**R. Tucker Abbott Memorial Trophy** – Harry Lee  
“Southpaw Seashells”

**William Clench Award** – Bob & Alice Pace  
“Landsnails Of The Philippines

**Shell Of The Show** – Ray Wichus (*Cypraea ostergaardi*  
Dall, 1921)

**Self-Collected Shell of the Show** - Bob & Alice Pace  
(*Turbo haraldi* Robertson, 1957)

**Florida-Caribbean Shell of the Show** – Bob & Alice  
Pace (*Harasewychia harasewychi* Petuch, 1987)

**Exhibitors Choice Award** - Bob & Alice Pace  
“Florida/Caribbean Rare Shells”

**Judges Special Awards** (one per-judge)

1. Jim Cordy – “It’s Better in the Bahamas”
2. Fay Mucha – “World-Wide *Lambis*”

## (Artistic Categories)

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### **B-1-1 Pictures**

1<sup>st</sup> – Ray Wichus

2<sup>nd</sup> – Gertrude Moller (Jacksonville)

3<sup>rd</sup> – Judy Blocker

### **B-1-2 Flower Arrangements**

1<sup>st</sup> – Judy Allen

2<sup>nd</sup> – Betsy Lyerly (Jacksonville)

3<sup>rd</sup> – Judy Allen

### **B-1-3 Christmas Related Items**

1<sup>st</sup> – Anne Joffe (Sanibel-Captiva Shell Club)

2<sup>nd</sup> – Betsy Lyerly

3<sup>rd</sup> – Selma Hutchison (Jacksonville)

### **B-1-4 Mirrors**

1<sup>st</sup> – Selma Hutchison

1<sup>st</sup> – Gertrude Moller

2<sup>nd</sup> – Betsy Lyerly

2<sup>nd</sup> – Judy Blocker

2<sup>nd</sup> – Selma Hutchison

### **B-1-5 Jewelry And Personal Accessories**

1<sup>st</sup> – Judy Blocker

### **B-1-7 Photography**

1<sup>st</sup> – Leslie Crnkovic

2<sup>nd</sup> – Alice Monroe

2<sup>nd</sup> – Alice Monroe

### **B-1-8 Novelties**

1<sup>st</sup> – Anne Joffe

2<sup>nd</sup> – Cathy Williams (Jacksonville)

### **B-1-9 Needlework**

1<sup>st</sup> – Bobbi Cordy

2<sup>nd</sup> – Anne Joffe

3<sup>rd</sup> – Bobbi Cordy

### **B-1-10 Wreaths And Wall Hangings**

1<sup>st</sup> – Judy Blocker

### **B-1-11 Home Décor**

1<sup>st</sup> – Judy Blocker

2<sup>nd</sup> – Rob & D.D. Jewell (Jacksonville)

3<sup>rd</sup> – Rodney Davis (Jacksonville)

### **B-1-12 Miscellaneous**

1<sup>st</sup> – D.D. Jewell

2<sup>nd</sup> – Anne Joffe

3<sup>rd</sup> – George Hapsis (Jacksonville)

### **B-2-1 Not The Work Of The Exhibitor (any display)**

1<sup>st</sup> – Gertrude Moller

2<sup>nd</sup> – Ray Wichus

**Helen Murchison Award** – Gertrude Moller (mirror)

**Most Creative** – Anne Joffe (novelties)

**Judges Special Awards** (one per-judge)

1. Bobbi Cordy (needlework)
2. Judy Blocker (home décor)

## **Hammock Hopping And The Reward Of The Day**

By Mark Williams Johnson

It's hot. It's really hot. The rain shower that was passing through has just now passed, and the sun has returned with a vengeance. The high humidity isn't allowing evaporation, and I am soaked with perspiration. The trees in the hardwood hammock stifle the lazy ocean breeze that normally caresses these parts of south Florida, and the mosquitoes have found me once again. The hot air is alive with the endless buzz of various insects, and the ineffective insect repellent in which I am covered is mixing with the sweat running down my face, burning my eyes. Paper wasps nesting under every other Sabal Palmetto threaten me regularly, and I have been stung once today already. I have to pause to brush away the tiny, biting ants every few moments, and I am covered with tiny scratches from the multitudes of unforgiving thorny vines and shrubs. I just heard the terrible and unmistakable buzz of a rattlesnake as it rustled away beneath the dense brush. I never saw it, but I won't forget that noise for a long time. My camera is taking a beating of its own. Continuously taking it out of my backpack and then replacing it is way too tedious and time consuming (speed is everything when you're shooting nature), so I have it slung over my neck. The camera body, a Nikon F4, is generally bullet proof (the sole reason I own it), but the auto-focusing lens is already protesting the grime as well as the showering it took earlier, threatening to warrant a costly replacement for the third time. My lens cap was knocked off and lost over an hour ago. I just fell down. I am overheated. I am tired. I am covered in spider webs and, most likely, the spiders. I have a rapidly advancing poisonwood rash on my left forearm. I am filthy. I am all alone. The internal voice that has guided me on so many past adventures is opting for sitting on the couch back home. You're probably wondering what I'm doing here. I am wondering the same thing myself. But, alas, I am photographing nature, particularly snails, in the beautiful yet menacing splendor of the hardwood hammocks of Southern Florida.

Of particular interest to me today is the Florida Tree Snail, *Liguus fasciatus* (Müller, 1774). Considered a single species, this tree-dwelling pulmonate has some fifty-nine named color varieties, many of which can readily be observed in the hardwood hammocks of the Florida Keys and the Everglades. From fully albinistic to richly hued with every color of the rainbow, no two color varieties are completely alike. After the passing summer rain shower, the snails are actively out and about, feasting on the soot mold, fungi and lichen

growing on smooth-barked trees, particularly the Wild Tamarind (*Lysiloma latisiliqua*) and the Jamaican Dogwood (*Piscidia piscipula*). The snails will feed and grow during the summer, then mate and lay eggs early in the fall, climbing down the tree to deposit their eggs under a couple inches of leaf litter. The *Liguus* will estivate (a snail's answer to hibernation) during the dry winter months, attaching the aperture of the shell to a tree by means of a hardened mucus seal called an epiphragm. In the spring, the snails will come out of estivation, the eggs will hatch into tiny replicas of the parents, and the process will repeat itself.

These beautiful and delicate shells are extremely interesting to me, as are the many stories told by "old time" collectors who studied, transplanted, and collected *Liguus* more than a decade before I was born. With perhaps the exception of the Queen Conch, there isn't a single species of Florida mollusk that has fascinated and captivated collectors more powerfully than *Liguus fasciatus*. Prior to the late 1980s, thousands of Florida *Liguus* were being taken annually by scores of collectors. Ultimately, due to a combination of collecting pressures and widespread development, the species was named by the Florida Game and Fresh Water Fish Commission as a "Species of Special Concern", thereby outlawing collecting of either living or dead *Liguus*. Under legal and conservation pressures, most snail enthusiasts now brave the hammocks either to observe and study the snails or practice "collection by photography", which is what brings me here.

Archie Jones of Miami, the acknowledged authority on Florida Tree Snails, says that a person needs two traits to effectively study *Liguus* in their natural environment. The first is high endurance. The second is a low IQ.

Did I forget to mention that it's hot? I feel confident that my efforts of the day have netted some reasonably good shots of five or six color forms. It's really quite fortunate for me that it rained earlier. Although the camera and I both got soaked, the *Liguus* have come out of hiding and are actively crawling about the trees, making for some great shots. But now the Gatorade is finally gone, and I just ate my second mosquito (interestingly enough, the things will actually fly in your mouth if you leave it open long enough). As I load my fifth roll of film into my camera, now over two hours into my jaunt, I decide it's about time to return to my car. As I begin the long and laborious process of removing myself from this beautiful yet tiresome place, I notice more snails that I didn't see earlier. On the tree directly in front of me, right at eye-level, are two bright white *Liguus fasciatus* that are modeling a naturalist's dream (my dream, anyway): side by side, they are climbing a small sapling, both animals extended from

their shell. The shells are in a dark setting, but I decide to try to get a picture anyway. I raise my camera to take a picture, then stop dead in my tracks. The shells are a mirror image of each other. One of the shells is sinistral. I slowly close my eyes and open them again. A bug bites me. The *Liguus* are still there, slowly making their way up the tree, side by side, and one of them is still sinistral. Sinistral Florida *Liguus* are extremely rare, as any *Liguus* aficionado will tell you, and I am stunned by my good fortune. According to published literature, perhaps only 1 in every 10,000 *Liguus fasciatus* is sinistral, but absolute data are, of course, elusive. Suddenly, the heat and the insects seem distant. This is why I bought the F4. This is why I'm out here. This is, for me, a once in a lifetime opportunity.

My battered Nikon is at the ready. It's tricky, though, because I can't risk touching or repositioning the snails. If bothered, they will quickly retract into their shells for an unbearably long while, maybe not emerging before long after the heat and bugs force me to leave. It's also a little tricky because the snails are in the deep shadows of the hammock. I don't have a flash (it didn't survive the downpour of last month's outing, a day I like to call "Black Thursday"), so lighting, and consequently depth-of-field, are problematic. I pull from my bag of tricks (a.k.a. my spider web entombed backpack) a photographic reflector so as to angle sunlight directly on the snails. Still, I can only manage F 5.6 at 1/60<sup>th</sup> of a second, so extreme close up photography is limited due to poor depth-of-field (if the shell is in focus, the animal will be out of focus, and vice-versa). Additionally, the camera will tend to expose the picture based primarily on the bright white shells in the center of the viewfinder, causing the animal and the background to appear darkened in the resulting photograph. My solution is to shoot the shells from about 20 inches away (my lens is a 60 mm. macro), allowing as much light onto the subjects as possible with the reflector. Although the depth-of-field is still a problem, I try to minimize it by focusing on the area where the snail emerges from the shell. I then manually use +2 exposure compensation to lighten the background, and hope that the folks in my hometown film processing shop can do the rest. With high hopes and an increasing amount of insect repellent running into my eyes, the mosquitoes and I shoot three more rolls of film.

I arrive at my car just as dusk arrives on the Hammock. Physically, I am a beaten man, but I am very content with the accomplishments of the day. I pull a tick off myself and hope that whatever else is on me won't bite me while I'm driving, a potentially disastrous situation for all involved. I head towards a good, come-as-you-are, greasy spoon-type restaurant down the road where nobody looks twice at how bad you look. I get

looked at twice anyway. Neither the spiders nor I much care.

**Comment:** It should be noted that all color forms of *Liguus faciatus* are considered under the mantle of a Species of Special Concern in Florida, and it is illegal to collect either living or dead shells without a permit. Additionally, while many Southern Florida hammocks are accessible and open to the public, many natural hammocks of the Florida Keys (and other areas) forbid trespassing (some may be accessed by special permit). As indicated, the hardwood hammocks, especially in the Florida Keys, can be an unforgiving habitat. Be prepared. Be sure to know the laws that apply if you wish to partake in the observing and photography of these beautiful and interesting mollusks.

**Note:** This article, accompanied by a color image, can be found on the club web pages at:

[www.jaxshells.org/hammock.htm](http://www.jaxshells.org/hammock.htm).

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**From The Lamanai Ruins To  
The San Pedro Lagoon -  
Ooh, La, La!  
Shelling In The Belize Experience**  
By Karen VanderVen

As a die-hard sheller, when I am on a trip, I want to be in the water as much as possible doing you-know-what. On a recent trip to Belize, Central America, I became a believer also in lifting my head upward from the beaches and bottoms long enough so as to experience the country a bit - its history and natural features. Of course, the fact that visits to a variety of shelling habitats in this tropical land were also in the offing made this trip a "must - do". Thanks to my ever- forbearing husband who, when he heard that there would be a visit to Mayan ruins included and wanting me to broaden my horizons, encouraged me to go.

The odyssey began in Miami as Peggy Williams, trip leader, shepherded her flock of six together to check-in. Soon Joe and Betsy Johnston from North Carolina, Dot Kierstead and Yvonne Lloyd from Florida, Brig Alexander and myself from Pittsburgh, along with Peggy, were on the plane for the flight two hours southwest and, passing two time zones, two hours earlier. Crossing the Florida Keys, Cuba and Cozumel, before we knew it we had landed in Belize City.

**It's A Jungle Out There**

After settling into our very pleasant tropical style hotel, we were in a van headed south to the famous Belize Zoo, where the animals are uncaged in a natural jungle setting.

Jaguars, snakes (including non-venomous boa and deadly *fer-de-lance*), birds, crocodiles, the famous jabiru storks all engaged our attention. We would have to approach an area identified as the habitat of a given animal and quietly wait for it to show itself by noise or movement. Most captivating to me was a little otter or "river dog" who dove backwards into its pool, swiftly swam underwater to suddenly surface right in front of me, pop up out of the water, and plop back in to repeat the process.

The next day, we were up early to drive up to the town of Orange Walk, our embarkation point for the jungle boat trip down the New River about 20 miles to Lamanai, a Mayan ruin. Fitted out safari-style with hats and binoculars and sitting comfortably in the open boat, we were entranced by the winding curves of the river, the thick tropical palms and other trees, tannin-stained quiescent brown water, and flowered lily pads upon which exotic birds lit. As we moved down the New River, I marveled to my boat mates - "Two days ago Pittsburgh - today the jungle." I had never felt so far from home in such a joyful way.

We stopped to search for unusual and grayish hard-spot boat-billed herons in the dense foliage, with finally each person in the boat-filled harem was able to get a glimpse of the birds. For the birders, among the bird species spotted and identified were jacana, wood stork, purple gallinule, snowy egret, ring-necked kingfisher, cormorant, mangrove swallow, kiskadee flycatcher, snail eating kite, toucan, and little green heron. I'm sure those keeping their birding "life lists" got some additions.

Upon arrival at the developed clearing with a choice of souvenir shops that was the entry point to the ruins, we were served a delicious traditional Belizean lunch, including red beans, rice, plantains, and boiled spicy chicken. Then our guide came forth to take us first to an artifact filled museum and then on to the ruins. He had the knowledge and the vocabulary of an Oxford professor as he explained their history and structure in great detail to a neck-stretching audience as we gazed to the top of these huge structures. I decided to climb to the top for a photo of me gazing up at the sky to show my husband that yes - I went to the Mayan ruins - this was not just another of my eternal trips focused on only shells and always looking down.

Before the tour was over, the most ardent shellers had a chance to follow their collectors' instincts: there were beautiful round, dark striped large fresh water apple snails on the lagoon shore and land snails on the trails to the ruins.

The next day we boarded a plane at a tiny airport to fly to San Pedro, the town at the southern tip of Ambergris Cay. Before long we were in a guide-driven

boat, racing across cobalt blue offshore waters, eager for our first plunge for shelling.

### There's The Reef

We spent two days of shelling at different spots right inside the barrier reef, where a wide range of species was found. This was enhanced by the fact that the habitat was varied. There were areas with rocks and slabs to turn, strips and patches of sand to fan, and beds of grass to scan.

On our second day at another reef spot, what one didn't find for oneself, our guide, Mech, did. We got back in the boat to find that while we shelled, our native guide used his intimate knowledge of the area to bring back some treats for us. These included a stunning orange-rayed pair of *Tellina laevigata* Linnaeus, 1758 [Smooth Tellin], a perfect *Strombus gigas* Linnaeus, 1758 [Queen Conch], a fine *S. raninus* Gmelin, 1791 [Hawkwing Conch]; a *S. costatus* Gmelin, 1791 [Milk Conch] (whose aperture was **bright red** rather than the usual grayish white - a very unusual shell); a huge live *Cassis madagascarensis* Lamarck, 1822 [Cameo Helmet], and, every sheller's dream, a *Strombus gallus* Linnaeus, 1758 [Roostertail Conch]. These were parceled out faster than an angry tulip snaps at a collector's grasping hand. Incredibly, each of us got the particular shell we craved, in my case the Smooth Tellin. Tellins are one of my favorite species and this will certainly be a centerpiece of my tellin collection.

Collectively, there was a multiplicity of interesting species taken on the reef side of the cay including (besides the shells already mentioned): *Tellina listeri* Röding, 1798 [Speckled Tellin], *Tellina fausta* Pulteney, 1799 [Favored Tellin], *Barbatia cancellaria* (Lamarck, 1819) [Red-brown Ark], *Ctenoides scaber* (Born, 1778) [Rough Fileclam] and *Limaria pellucida* (C. B. Adams, 1846) [Antillean Fileclam], *Caribachlamys imbricata* (Gmelin, 1791) [Knobby Scallop], *C. sentis* (Reeve, 1853) [Scaly Scallop], and *C. ornata* (Lamarck, 1819) [Ornate Scallop]; *Mitra nodulosa* (Gmelin, 1791) [Beaded Miter], *M. barbadosis* (Gmelin, 1791) [Barbados Miter], *Trachypollia nodulosa* (C. B. Adams, 1845) [Blackberry Drupe], *Bursa granularis cubaniana* (d'Orbigny, 1842) [Cuba Frogsnail], *Vasum muricatum* (Born, 1778) [Caribbean Vase], *Talparia cinerea* (Gmelin, 1791) [Atlantic Gray Cowrie], *Erosaria acicularis* (Gmelin, 1791) [Atlantic Yellow Cowrie], *Tegula fasciata* (Born, 1778) [Silky Tegula], *Bailya intricata* (Dall, 1884) [Intricate Phos], *Volvaria avena* (Kiener, 1834) [Orange-band Marginella], *Diodora minuta* (Lamarck, 1822) [Dwarf Keyhole Limpet], *Tonna pennata* (Mørch, 1852) [Atlantic Partridge Tun], *Engina turbinella* (Kiener, 1835) [White-spot Engina],

*Arene cruentata* (Mühlfeld, 1829) [Star Cyclostreme], *Lithopoma tectum* (Lightfoot, 1786) [West Indian Starsnail], *Cymatium nicobaricum* (Röding, 1798) [Goldmouth Triton], *Cassis tuberosa* (Linnaeus, 1758) [Caribbean Helmet], *C. flammea* (Linnaeus, 1758) [Flame Helmet], *Cyphoma gibbosum* (Linnaeus, 1758) [Flamingo Tongue], *Chicoreus pomum* (Gmelin, 1791) [Apple Murex], *Pinna carnea* Gmelin, 1791 [Amber Penschell], *Prunum guttatatum* (Dillwyn, 1817) [White-spot Marginella], *P. apicinum* (Menke, 1828) [Common Atlantic Marginella], *Cerithium guinaicum* Philippi, 1849 [Guinea Cerith], *C. litteratum* (Born, 1778) [Stocky Cerith], *C. lutosum* Menke, 1829 [Variable Cerith], *Morum oniscus* (Linnaeus, 1767) [Atlantic Morum], *Tracypollia turricola* (von Maltzan, 1884) [Twin Drupe], *Conus jaspideus* Gmelin, 1791 [Jasper Cone], *Leucozonia nassa* (Gmelin, 1791) [Chestnut Latirus], *Teralatirus cayohuesonicus* (G. B. Sowerby III, 1878) [Key West Latirus], *Zebina browniana* (d'Orbigny, 1842) [Smooth Risso], *Naticarius canrena* (Linnaeus, 1758) [Colorful Moonshell], *Hipponix antiquatus* (Linnaeus, 1767) [White Hoofsnail].

Of note were the large and beautiful Barbados Miter and the Scaly Scallop that was dark purple - almost black. A tiny turrid, *Daphnella lymneiformis* (Kiener, 1840) [Volute Daphnelle], found on the underside of a rock and barely visible, was a special treat for me.

### Not Blue On The Lagoon

Two other days we were ferried through channels connecting the ocean to the bay side to shell in the lagoons created by the curving terrain. This turned out to be a fascinating area and one filled with new species to be collected. The main focus, the shell everybody wanted to find, was the elegant gray, long tailed, spinose murex *Haustellum messorium* (G. B. Sowerby II, 1841) [Messorius Murex].

On my first day, I patted every perturbation, fanned every spot in the sand, checked out every rocky cavity, and threaded my hand through the mossy grass in search of a specimen. No luck. So I sadly gave up and concentrated on what I **was** finding. And I was in no way unhappy with the fine live *Melongena melongena* (Linnaeus, 1758) [West-Indian Crown Conch] along with gorgeous multi-colored and sized *Fasciolaria tulipa* (Linnaeus, 1758) [True Tulip] that were turning up.

I heard voices over the water calling - "Karen, Peggy has something for you!" Like a lone shark suddenly sensing a bucket of chum, I zoomed over to Peggy who pointed in the water in front of her so that I could take the shell below. Soon the just visible little gray under water lump was in my hand - a fine Messorius Murex. "Self-collected" at that!

To add to the varied-colored and -patterned medium sized tulip specimens I found, Yvonne gave me a huge one she found which will definitely contribute to the tulip exhibit I am trying to put together for a shell show. It occurred to me that the quantity of these, and the fact there were no live ones seen, could be related to Hurricane Keith. This destructive storm, which blew through Belize in October, 2000 from the west sparing the oceanside reef, could have wreaked havoc on the lagoon side, such as killing the tulips.

There were other shells as well: Stocky Ceriths, *Battillaria minima* (Gmelin, 1791) [West Indian False Cerith], and a variety of bivalves: *Scapharca brasiliiana* (Lamarck, 1819) [Incongruous Ark], *Chione cancellata* (Linnaeus, 1767) [Cross-barred Venus], *Tellina aequistriata* Say, 1824 [Striate Tellin], *Laevicardium mortoni* (Conrad, 1830) [Yellow Eggcockle], and even pairs of *Anomia simplex* (d'Orbigny, 1846) [Common Jingle]. I found just one pair of a beautiful greenish striped oyster, *Pinctada imbricata* Röding, 1798 [Atlantic Pearl-oyster], which Peggy also found alive on the turtle grass.

On a subsequent trip to the lagoon, I found several *Messorium Murex* on top of the sand. Curious as to why on one day they were buried and hard to spot, and readily visible another day, Peggy explained that the sand in one area was deeper before the rocky substrate was reached, so that the shell couldn't bury itself so far. While shelling this day, she called us all to swim over for a special treat. As she later described it "We were privileged to watch *Messorium Murex* laying eggs in a communal clump - in San Pedro Lagoon in about four feet of water. There were several *Murex* in the area, some heading for the clump and some away (finished?) Some were moving very actively. The clump was about 8 inches across at that time and there were about six animals still laying. It was loose in a depression in the sand." We all gazed at this display and then carefully swam off.

### Searching For The Lost Colony

On the way to another part of lagoon on another afternoon, we tried to locate an ostensible colony of *Strombus pugilis* Linnaeus, 1758 [West Indian Fighting Conch] that lived offshore on the southern part of the cay. To aid us in spotting them, Peggy and I were towed on long ropes on the back of the boat. The experience was akin to water skiing on one's abdomen and I could even slalom back and forth to extend my view. I smiled to myself as I thought of the numerous methods people used to collect shells and the fact that we were using many of them on this trip. Unfortunately the conchs eluded us, for this trip anyway but those of us who really

wanted a few specimens were able to buy them from a souvenir store down the street from our hotel. Home, a bit of additional cleaning, oiling, and placement in a specimen box have made these quite attractive.

### It's An Ill Wind That Blows Nobody Good

This old proverb applied well to our last day. We had hoped to take a day trip with a picnic to a spot where the reef comes in close to the shoreline. Sipping my early morning coffee on the porch, I periodically put my mystery novel down long enough to realize that whitecaps, flapping flags and bending palms before me indicated too-rough weather for an oceanside boat ride. "Trade winds", I harrumphed to myself. "I guess so - they certainly suppress the dive trade". I contemplated a day in the San Pedro Internet Cafe.

However, Peggy quickly concocted an alternate plan for the day: Ride in golf carts to the ferry to the north shore of the island, cross, check out any beaches we wanted, and have lunch. Brig decided to opt for a snorkel trip to swim with sharks. Joe and Peggy took the helms of the carts and adroitly piloted the rest of us down the busy main street. We rolled up onto the quaint but utilitarian rope-pulled ferry across the channel separating the southern from northern part of the cay, and soon we found our first beach area - and shells. Many shells.

This was probably the best beach shelling I have ever experienced - perhaps even rivaling Sanibel Island in its hey-day before the causeway was built. In the seaweed demarcated tide line were fine pairs of solidly colored bright yellow *Lucina pectinata* (Gmelin, 1791) [Thick Lucine] in a range of sizes. These were absolutely stunning and ennoble this humble and common family. They were also a refreshing break for this Pennsylvanian from the eternal *Lucina pensylvanica* (Linnaeus, 1758) [Pennsylvania Lucine], whose dreary shells seem to be abundant in spots where otherwise there is **nothing**.

I ventured up further onto land where offshore sand was being piped up in a dredging operation and found a pair of Favored Tellins with the demised animal still inside. We've all found lots of perfectly fine pairs of this common shell all over the Bahamas. After cleaning, however, this turned out to be more than your usual ho-hum pair of clams. In perfect condition and hinged, each yellow valve is sharply bordered at the edge by pure white. Other bivalves included purple-brownish marsh clams (*Polymesoda* species), *Codakia orbicularis* (Linnaeus, 1758) [Tiger Lucine], *Glycymeris pectinata* (Gmelin, 1791) [Comb Bittersweet], and *Cucullaearca candida* (Helbling, 1779) [White-beard Ark] - more attractive than you might think.



In the univalve department, it was “*Marginella Mecca*”. Fine specimens of White-spot *Marginella* and *Prunum oblongum* (Swainson, 1829) [Oblong *Marginella*] - right on the shore, if you can believe; Common Atlantic *Marginella*s, and another species of marginellid, yellow and slender, that Peggy recognized as different from the others that were found. *Astrarium phoebia* (Röding, 1798) [Longspine Starsnail] were abundant although these, truth to tell, had seen better days. There were *Bulla striata* Bruguière, 1792 [Striate Bubble], a dead but decent *Cypraea acassis testiculus* (Linnaeus, 1758), [Reticulate Cowrie-Helmet], and absolutely miniscule dark orange tulips.

We found two species of *Columbella* - *Columbella mercatoria* (Linnaeus, 1758) [West Indian Dovesnail] and *Columbella dysoni* Reeve, 1859 [Dyson’s Dovesnail]. Peggy showed me how to discriminate between the two. The latter, which I had never collected before, are more narrow and elongated than the West Indian Dovesnails, and the little brown markings make these very handsome little shells. There were numerous tiny species, including *Neritina*, *Cerithidea costata* (da Costa, 1778) [Costate Hornsnail], *Niveria quadripunctata* (J. E. Gray, 1827) [Four-spot Trivia], and even one *Smaragdia viridis* (Linnaeus, 1758) [Emerald Nerite], some Caribbean periwinkle species, *Littoraria nebulosa* (Lamarck, 1822) [Cloudy Periwinkle] and *L. angulifera* (Lamarck, 1822) [Mangrove Periwinkle].

As I marveled later at my finds of several new species I had never before collected anywhere, it occurred to me that that the whole day had a magical quality about it and that the winds had blown good fortune unexpectedly our way. Just one more feature of shelling - you just never know when you are going to get a very pleasant surprise. Brig had a great time mingling with the rays and sharks - and so a good time was had by all!

### Can You Belize it?

This clever saying seen on T-shirts in the souvenir shops reflects to me two things: the charm and delightful ambiance of Ambergris Cay, and the very pleasant “living” that is characteristic of it. (In fact, a recent study named Ambergris Cay as one of the top retirement spots in the world).

Certainly my preconceived beliefs about what I might expect in a tropical Central American country were punctured by my Belize experience. For this trip, anyway, all the cautionary tales heard beforehand about challenges of trips to tropical countries, and undoubtedly embellished in one’s mind, about torrents of rain leaving muddy puddles, swarms of mosquitoes diving for exposed skin, water of questionable drinking quality,

and oppressive heat were unsubstantiated. I, for one, didn’t get as much as a mosquito bite; there wasn’t a drop of rain, and there was either drinkable or bottled water available everywhere. While the brisk trade winds that blew our European forebears over the ocean to the New World made for some rough water around the reef, undoubtedly it also contributed to the pleasant temperature and blew the bugs off. We all did enjoy the little iguana that took a stroll through the sand right in front of our porches.

To be prepared for any medical contingency, I had assembled, before leaving Pittsburgh, a complete pharmacopoeia into a homemade medicine kit to cover any health contingency. I was even prepared to do dental repairs. The kit wasn’t needed both because nobody got sick and also because the local supermarket had a drug counter as big and well stocked as any in an American chain.

As for food, we got better and better at scoping the restaurants in San Pedro. Dot and Yvonne found a restaurant where residents ate in the morning and I enjoyed a substantial breakfast there with them one morning while chatting informally - and the food beat my usual mundane cold cereal and juice. We loved the little deli near the hotel where we could get a quick hot dog for lunch. We had several delightful and tasty evening meals at restaurants with sand floors serving tasty and well prepared meals of chicken and fresh fish. I’ve had few lunches as delicious as the one served at a restaurant called “Sweet Basil” on our last day. Several of us topped off our meals with hot fudge sundaes that energized us for the rest of the day’s shelling.

Our compatible group enjoyed strolling up and down the sandy streets of San Pedro, filled with enticing souvenir shops, and striking up conversations with the residents. Native San Pedroans seem to like basketball as much as I do (after shells, that is). One night I enjoyed insinuating myself into a shoot-around on an off-street court, dribbling the ball around a surprised defender (**nobody** is used to a ‘mature’ lady driving her way to the hoop and doing a pump fake) and praying that her shot would go in (it did!)

### Shell We “Say Belize”?

We posed for photographs here and there - in restaurants, on the boat dock, and once Betsy, camera in hand, had importuned us to “Say Belize” so that we’d smile widely, it was easy to let our good times and spirits be recorded for posterity. And they didn’t end right up until the last minute. Shells continued to come our way.

As we were packing the last morning, one of our shelling guides, Mech, came by bearing two spectacular

shells: a stunningly-marked *Charonia tritonis variegata* (Lamarck, 1816) [Atlantic Trumpet Triton] and a fine large Cameo Helmet. They were gifts for our group and the only question was - how would it be decided which shellers would take home these treasures in **their** shell bags? We quickly set up an auction process, and the drawing took place for those who wanted to participate. Dot won the triton, and Brig, the helmet.

In the meantime that last morning a very special event occurred that gave me just one more very warm memory to take away. On our very first day in Belize, I had walked down to the dive shop on the dock in front of our hotel and had gone in to get acquainted. I noticed a tray on the counter of beautiful shells that had been found on its dive trips. There were *Calliostoma javanicum* (Lamarck, 1822) [Chocolate-line Topsnail], Roostertail Conchs, and setting me to gaping, a fine *Conus granulatus* Linnaeus, 1758 [Glory-of-the-Atlantic Cone]. I admired the shells and offered to buy the cone, saying that it was a rare shell and that I'd offer an appropriate price for it. "Not for sale!" I was told. It was kept there to show prospective divers. Because of the winds, as mentioned, there had been no scuba diving for me or anyone else, and I wondered about the negative impact on the dive shops' business.

On the last day, I went in again and decided at least to buy one of their attractive T-shirts with a drawing of the "Mayan God of Scuba Diving" even though usually I don't buy a dive shirt unless I've actually dived with the outfit. As the young woman placed my shirt in a bag, she reached over to the tray and handing me the Glory-of-the-Atlantic Cone said "I remember that you like this shell. I'd like to give it to you". I offered again to buy it, but she emphatically said "no". I couldn't Belize this generous gift. I will certainly always remember it, especially as I glance over at the colorful orange and brown cone right here in a box with a deep blue lining.

By the end of the day, on an uneventful flight, we were back in Miami, and dispersed back to our homes - but with gorgeous and bountiful shells, and memories of the Belize experience, to connect us for a long time to come.

**Note:** This article, accompanied by color images, can be found on the club web pages at:

[www.jaxshells.org/belize.htm](http://www.jaxshells.org/belize.htm).

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