



SHELL-O-GRAM

Official Publication of the
JACKSONVILLE SHELL CLUB, INC.

May-June, 2000

Volume 41(3)

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May Meeting

The Thursday May 25th meeting of the Jacksonville Shell Club will be held at the Southeast Branch Public Library at 7:00 PM.

The month's educational program will be presented by Professor Alice Monroe (St. Petersburg Junior College) and is entitled "The Florida-Caribbean Marine Province: Why aren't there more species?"

The Shell-Of-The-Month will be given by Bill Frank on *Strombus raninus* Gmelin, 1791 – the Hawk-wing Conch – a Caribbean species.

As is customary, refreshments will be served and guests are cordially invited to attend.

June Meeting

The Thursday, June 22nd meeting of the Jacksonville Shell Club will be held at the usual time and place.

Teresa St. John will present the month's educational program on "Preparing an exhibit for a shell show."

The Shell-Of-The-Month will be given by Harry Lee on *Strombus oldi* Emerson, 1965 - Old's Conch – the rarest species in the genus.

Plans for the upcoming shell show will also be finalized.

Plan now to attend and bring a friend or guest!

Anomalous Sinistrality

By Phil Poland*

Say what?

Once in a great while, if you're a lucky and observant snailer, you'll come across one. Something doesn't look right and - "Holy Cow! I got one!" This is exactly what I said when I found my latest sinistral, or lefthanded, snail several months ago.

Sinistral shells are mirror-images of the shells of normal (in most species) snails.

No one has ever developed a plausible explanation for the overwhelming predominance of righthandedness, or dextrality, among gastropods. Some hints that problems may arise for sinistral snails include (as noted by our own Harry Lee and others) a much higher rate of sinistrality occurring in utero (or at least in egg cases), suggesting a higher mortality rate for the abnormal snails.

Sinistral shells are never sought, just found, as by-products of more realistic snailing goals.

I seem to have found more than my fair share of these, and I'm sure it has to do with sheer numbers examined. Techniques I use to find snails lead to my having to look at a lot of specimens over time. I use a net routinely to sample grasses, sand, mud, algae, etc. Each scoop may bring up dozens of individuals, almost all returned immediately to the environment. I also use sieves to uncover the really small species and, in this way too, look at thousands of specimens over time. (Continued on page 4.)



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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.



38th Annual Conch Shell Blowing Contest

The 38th annual conch shell blowing contest was held in Key West, Florida (Conch Republic) on March 18th. The competition was a highlight of Key West's Old Island Days celebration, commemorating the island's heritage and history.

This year's event attracted 58 entries in both individual and group categories, and contestants ranged in age from 3-year-old girl from Key West to a 90-year-old Grand Haven, Michigan, resident. The judges scored for clearness of tone, duration of sound, range, loudness and novelty.

The group division winners were three Key Westers (AKA Conchs on Conchs), whose rendition of the theme from "2001 – A space Odyssey" (Richard Strauss's classic "Thus Spake Zarathustra"), was accompanied by booming tympana. Not surprisingly, the leader of the group is the Key West High School (Fighting Conchs) band director.

Two of the three then went on to win top honors in the adult category with a rousing rendition of Russian composer Aram Khachaturian's "Sabre Dance," tooted with two conch shells simultaneously.

Key West natives are affectionately known as conchs, and transplanted residents can claim the title of "freshwater conchs" after living on the island for at least seven years. Even the Keys county commission awards "Honorary Conch Certificates."

Conch shells have been used as communications devices for hundreds of years, and the Calusa Indians, early residents of the Keys, once used conch shells for message transmission. A toot could mean a sign of distress or survival.

Editor's Comments: While the word "conch" is a generic term which can mean different things to different people, in the Florida Keys it is generally used to refer to *Strombus gigas* Linnaeus, 1758 (Queen Conch). The giant Queen Conch displayed in front of the Key West High School and the species' prominent placement on the Conch Republic Flag evidences this. However, it should be noted that photographs of this year's competitors show that the species utilized during the competition included the Queen Conch, *Pleuroploca gigantea* (Kiener, 1840) (Horse Conch), *Charonia tritonis variegata* (Lamarck, 1816) (Atlantic Trumpet Triton), and the Indo-Pacific species *Charonia tritonis tritonis* (Linnaeus, 1758) (Pacific Trumpet Triton).

*Gleaned from information available on "The Official Tourism Council Web Site for the Florida Keys" at <http://fla-keys.com/index.htm>.

Marion Richeson (1916–2000)

Mrs. Marion Richeson passed-away on February 9th at the age of 84. Mrs. Richeson had been a member of the Jacksonville Shell Club for over 25 years and was best known for her beautiful and delicate shellcraft pictures. Despite advancing age and health problems (including a stroke which left her virtually unable to speak), Marion had entered the club's shell show as recently as last year – where, of course, she garnered her usual 1st place win.

Mrs. Richeson's sister, Katherine Patterson, has generously donated Mrs. Richeson's shells/shellcraft supplies to the club.

Louise Ryals – Gone But Not Forgotten

Mrs. Louise Ryals, affectionately known as “Aunt Louise,” passed away April 7th in St. Lukes Hospital. Mrs. Ryals had been a member of the Jacksonville Shell Club for over 15 years until declining health overtook her. Some of the veteran members will recall collecting with Louise on outings to the “scallop dumps” of our area. She was a friendly presence during the halcyon days of the *Argopecten gibbus* fishery and the Camp Alamacani “treasure hunts.” She will be greatly missed.

Her niece (Mrs. Nelly Hawley) has generously donated Mrs. Ryals shells/shell craft material to the club.

Alberta Stacy (1904-2000)

Jacksonville Shell Club charter member and honorary lifetime member Alberta Stacy passed-away at the age of 95 on February 7th. Mrs. Stacy was the one who coined the name “Shell-O-Gram” for the club’s newsletter – the masthead under which it has been continually published since the second issue in November of 1960.

The first issue of the newsletter (October, 1960) carried the simple title “Jacksonville Shell Club Bulletin.” The fledging club decided that a more appropriate name was in order and the bulletin editor, Mrs. Elizabeth Eubanks, urged members to “Please put on your original thinking caps and bring all your resulting brain children to the October meeting so next month’s bulletin won’t be nameless.” As it came to pass, several good names were proposed, and, by secret ballot, Mrs. Stacy’s “Shell-O-Gram” was selected as the winner.

Mrs. Stacy is survived by one daughter, Pheriba Stacy Pritchett of Baltimore, MD (see below).

Changes To Membership List

- Welcome New Members -

Mrs. Pheriba Stacy Pritchett
1624 North Calvert St.
Baltimore, MD 21202

Harold & Lucilla Hatter
2650 Stern Dr. N.
Atlantic Beach, FL 32233-2922
Phone: (904) 249-6249
E-mail: Hmadhater@aol.com

- Change Of Address -

Selma & Andy Hutchison
541 Boxwood Place
St. Augustine, FL 32086-7294
Phone: (904) 794-4586

- Rejoined Member -

Dorothy Eanetta
6109 Sabre Dr.
Jacksonville, FL 32244-3145
Phone: (904) 772-6378

In The Mail

---Fort Worth, TX: Winston Barney wrote to thank the club editorial board for kindness extended to him and enclosed a cash donation to further club endeavors.

Editor’s Comments: Winston was one of the Conchologists of America members who attended that organization’s convention hosted by the Jacksonville Shell Club in Ponte Vedra Beach during 1992. Upon seeing the *Oliva sayana* form *citrina* Johnson, 1911 (Golden Olive) that your editor had recently found at the time, he requested directions to the appropriate beach. Although the beach in question was on a military installation (Mayport Naval Station) and then unavailable to a member of the general public, I directed him to the next closest beach (Hanna Park), where Winston and his wife promptly found an elusive Golden Olive – an amazing feat.

---Cumberland Island, GA: Club member and biologist Carol Ruckdeschel wrote to say that she and her research partner, Bob Shoop, along with George Zug, senior curator of amphibians and reptiles at the Smithsonian Institution’s National Museum of Natural History, have written a booklet entitled “Sea Turtles of the Georgia Coast.”

While the three are well-known in research and academic circles for their expertise, the book is not a scholarly tome but is a popular presentation about the sea turtles that are found in Georgia waters and is really aimed at the lay person. The booklet is being published by the Cumberland Island Museum (founded by Carol and Bob) and is expected to be available by the second week of April. If you are interested in the booklet and pricing, Carol (and the museum) can be contacted at P.O. Box 796, St. Marys, GA, 31558-0796.

As an added note, to add to the existing knowledge of sea turtle migration and feeding, Carol advises that a graduate student, working on his Master’s thesis, will be

coming to Cumberland Island for the summer to sort deceased sea turtle gut contents collected over the past 20 years. Assistant Newsletter Editor Harry Lee has agreed to assist in the project by identifying the molluscan material.

Read A Good Book Lately?

Even in today's world of mega-book stores such as Barnes & Noble, Books-A-Million, etc., it is rare to find a single location with an extensive stock of books that would be of interest to a shell collector. However, there is one such place available to all of us – the Bailey-Matthews Shell Museum located on Sanibel Island.

The museum's year 2000 list of available books contains some 105 titles covering just about everything related to shells (Recent & fossil), the seashore, nature, shell craft, as well as a wide variety of other peripheral topics – all offered at a competitive price.

If you are interested in a particular book, you can write the museum at 3075 Sanibel-Captiva Rd, Sanibel, FL 33957, call toll-free at 1-888-679-6450, Email the museum director (José Leal) at jleal@gate.net, or stop by during your next trip to Sanibel. The museum accepts most major credit cards as well as checks and money orders. Bailey-Matthews Shell Museum Members receive a 10% discount.

Anomalous Sinistrality – Continued from page 1.

What are the odds of finding one? R. Tucker Abbott estimated that one in five thousand *Prunum apicinum* (Menke, 1828) (Common Atlantic Marginella), a common marginellid in Florida, might be sinistral. The rate is probably far lower for most other species, the vast majority of which are unknown in sinistral condition.

Many years ago, when mammoths still walked the earth and snailers were not spat upon, I, as a beginning collector, had some luck. In southeast Florida, little white land snails, *Cerion incanum* (A. Binney, 1851) (Gray Cerion), are found clinging to grass stems and shrubs near the shore. I was intrigued with the few in a hundred that were marked with brown, and the few in a thousand that were ribbed. I looked for these forms and, as a result of the scrutiny, found four sinistrals in a year in one population on Boca Chica Key near Key West. I was new at this. My success and Abbott's estimate left me thinking – “Ho hum, another one.” I gave them away.

As it turns out, this population was quite unusual and the frequency of occurrence within it (one in a few

thousand?) may suggest a genetic basis for at least some sinistrality.

A few years later, back in the Keys and using a net this time, I found Abbott's sinistral *Prunum*. In the quiescent shallows behind Missouri Key, I was picking up dozens of large pale forms of the species in each scoop and – “Oh gee!”

Over the next 28 years of scooping I found two more, both the typical brown-banded form, and both from Boca Ciega Bay near St. Petersburg. *Prunum apicinum* I have seen thousands of and I suspect that Abbott was not far off.

I've had very good luck with marginellids.

One winter, about ten years ago, a bloom of a related species, *Prunum* cf. *avenaceum* (Deshayes, 1844) (cf. Little Oat Marginella), occurred in the same bay. I was shaking them out of dead pen shells and cans found in grassy shallows into my net and – “Wow!” I wanted to surprise a collector friend with it and gave him a matched set of both a dextral and the sinistral I'd found, along with some other specimens. As it turns out, he didn't recognize it as special and either misplaced it or pitched it! “!@#!” I've examined several hundred of this species.

Another sinistral marginellid, *Pugnus serrei* (Bavay, 1911),** was found as I examined sieved material rinsed from clumps of the alga *Halimeda* from a Keys location. I've seen fewer than a hundred specimens of this species.

I visited a quiet Florida Bay location near Marathon, about halfway between Key West and Miami, and found yet another sinistral marginellid, *Volvarina avena* (Kiener, 1834) (Orange-band Marginella). One clump of intertidal *Halimeda* yielded about a dozen specimens, including the prize. I've examined fewer than two hundred of this species.



Caracolus marginella (Gmelin, 1791)

My guess (based on my experience and reports from other collectors) is that the sinistrality rate for marginellids in general is close to Abbott's estimate for *P. apicinum*.

“They don't grow on trees, ya know.” However, they can be found there. A few months back, at the height of landsnail season (funny, but motel rates remained low), I

collected *Caracolus marginella* (Gmelin, 1791) (Banded Caracol), a large and attractive invader from the Greater Antilles. These snails are reasonably common in an area of Miami between Coconut Grove and downtown during the rainy months. I have to admit that I didn't notice the single sinistral when it was collected. Hey, it's **dark** in those woods!

Why title this story "Anomalous Sinistrality?" Firstly, I want you to have an opportunity to say it quickly four times. Secondly, not all sinistrals are anomalous. Our own Florida *Busycon sinistrum* Hollister, 1958 (Lightning Whelk) is a dramatic example of a normally sinistral snail. The winter before last, I braved chill winds and rain on the offshore bars near Cedar Key. My effort was rewarded with the find of a large female of the species, anomalously dextral.



Cerion incanum (A. Binney, 1851)

On my latest trip to the Keys, I was wandering down a path near the shore, just before sunset, and spotted an old favorite of mine on a bush, a maculated *Cerion*, and this takes us back to the beginning of this story – "Holy cow!"

I should mention that looking at large numbers of specimens leads to finding other abnormalities. A few months ago, my snailing partner pulled up a snow-white *Prunum apicinum* in Tampa Bay – a true albino, not a pale form. I have my own lists of albino and orange forms (partial albinism). High-spined and strangely-spined ones show up too. Shall we tackle these?

*2741 Enterprise Rd. E., #30, Clearwater, FL 33759, Email: ppoland@tampabay.rr.com.

**Common name is not listed in Turgeon, D. D., J. F. Quinn, Jr., A. E. Bogan, E. V. Coan, F. G. Hochberg, W. G. Lyons, P. M. Mikkelsen, R. J. Neves, C. F. E. Roper, G. Rosenberg, B. Roth, A. Scheltema, F. G. Thompson, M. Vecchione, and J. D. Williams, 1998. Common and scientific names of aquatic invertebrates from the United States and Canada: Mollusks, 2nd edition. *American*

Fisheries Society, Special Publication 26, Bethesda, Maryland, U.S.A.

Editor's Comments: Reverse-coiled gastropods collected by Phil Poland (13 specimens of 7 species):

- *Busycon sinistrum* Hollister, 1958
- *Prunum apicinum* (Menke, 1828) [3]
- *Prunum cf. avenaceum* (Deshayes, 1844)
- *Pugnus serrei* (Bavay, 1911)
- *Volvarina avena* (Kiener, 1834)
- *Caracolus marginella* (Gmelin, 1791)
- *Cerion incanum* (A. Binney, 1851) [5]

Southern Hemisphere Sinistrals

By Mariette Jearey*

Since sinistral coiling has been a hot topic in the Shell-O-Gram and you keep a record of various sinistral species, I thought I'd let you know about a recent find of mine. According to Markus Lussi, it is a cross between a typical *Volvarina zonata* (Kiener, 1841) and *V. zonata* form *cleo* Bartsch, 1915, and it is a beautiful live sinistral specimen of golden orange color with a deeper orange spiral band (grade F++). Suffice it to say that I made enough joyous noise on the rocks upon discovery to scare the nearby fisherman motherless. This is the fifth sinistral shell that I have personally found. I believe that it is pretty unusual to find one sinistral shell, let alone five (two *Cypraea capensis* Gray, 1828, two *Marginella piperata* Hinds, 1844, and now this *Volvarina*)!

I have seen one other sinistral *Volvarina*, *V. zonata* form *bilineata* (Krauss, 1848), at Brian Hayes' before.** It was from an old collection that he had bought. It was in a bag with about 20 dextrals of its form. It appears as though the collector was not even aware of the fact that the one shell was sinistral.

I've been collecting marine shells for about eleven years now. In the beginning I was so dense that I thought the blotches on *Cypraea capensis* were the result of oil/tar spillage on the beach (Cape Recife, Southern point of Algoa Bay) where I picked them up. Being typically female, I tried very hard to remove the offensive blotches. (Laugh all you want). Once I realized that the blotch was species-specific, I put all my *C. capensis*, dorsum up, in a row in front of me. There was this one crazy shell that would not fit - no matter how I turned it. *Voilà*, my first sinistral shell. Of course, at the time, I did not realize just how rare and special they are; all I knew was that there was something wrong with it.

Five years later, after many miles of walking and many "dry" months of shelling, wouldn't you know it,

another "Voilà!" The only shell on the beach! I bet that any person watching me at the time would have thought me certifiable. Singing a raunchy "Alleluja" comes to memory. Subsequently I have sold both those shells, the first (for a fraction of its real value) so I could buy my own SCUBA tank, the second to help finance my recent trip to America and the Bahamas. Later in that same year (June, 1991) I found a sinistral *Marginella piperata* on the beach at Jeffreys Bay and another year later, a second one, which was so coveted by a *Marginella*-collector friend, even though it had a missing protoconch, that I gave the shell to him. So, to date I have only the two sinistral shells left: *Marginella piperata* and my latest find, the *Volvarina zonata* form *cleo*.

It seems to me that sinistral shells are elusive until you've discovered your first. After that, if it is "anomalously reverse-coiled" and it is in front of you, however rare the occasion, you WILL notice it.

That is my story. I'm doubtful that this will elevate me to the status of "super-sheller" since I am still an absolute lay person when it comes to the science of conchology. I still have a lot to learn. I do know this: I love the sea, I love shells, I love diving, I love the people that I've met through the shells. Since love is the only thing that can be divided without being diminished, I believe I have tapped a lot of love from this hobby and the container is still full.

*4 Clematis Ave., Sunridge Park, Port Elizabeth, 6045 South Africa, E-mail: jearev@icon.co.za.

**Brian Hayes is a South African collector/dealer.



THE SHELL SHOW IS COMING

Brampton Inn Resort – Jacksonville Beach, Florida

Saturday, July 15th and Sunday, July 16th

The show will be open to the public:

Saturday from 9:00 A.M. until 5:30 P.M.

Sunday from 10:00 A.M. until 5:00 P.M.

Don't procrastinate – get your entry forms in today!



Jacksonville Shell Club

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