



SHELL-O-GRAM

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Upcoming meetings



The **September** meeting of the Jacksonville Shell Club (JSC) will be held at the usual venue, the Southeast Branch of the Jacksonville Public Library <http://www.yelp.com/biz/jacksonville-public-library-southeast-regional-jacksonville>, on the **fourth** Thursday (the **26th**) in Function Room D at 7:00 PM. Mary Reynolds will present the shell(s)-of-the-month, the brachiopods. Once considered mollusks, these two-shelled invertebrates constitute a separate phylum, whose origin was coeval with that of the Mollusca in the Cambrian Period, > 500,000,000 years ago. On the **L** are four specimens of one of them, *Terebratulina septentrionalis* (Couthouy, 1838), the Northern Lamp Shell, in a photo taken by Daytona Beach JSC member Joel Wooster. The $\frac{3}{4}$ inch specimens were collected in 72-80 feet, two miles west of Compass Island, Penobscot Bay, ME. For the main program, Paul Jones, just

back from his Sanibel expedition, will report on his observations. He told us that his collecting partner plans to guide him to parts of the island generally overlooked by the legions of shellers who make pilgrimage to this edenic collecting destination. Consequently, we can expect to see some, ah, not so run-of-the-mill shells.

The JSC meeting-after-next will be on the customary fourth Thursday, **October 24th**. We'll convene at the usual time, 7:00 PM, in Room **D**. Rick Edwards will be back from Alaska, where he and Roz cruised in September. His shell-of-the-month will be an species from the 49th state. Member David Davies will give the main program "*Donax* and their ecosystems in Texas II; can *Donax* shells survive on Texas beaches after they die?" The peaceful habitat approximating what David presented us in August was dramatically disrupted in 1983 by Hurricane Alicia. As part of his doctoral research, he looked closely at the devastation of the coquinas and their habitat, including the response of these clams and the rest of the swash zone ecosystem. Photo on **R** by Bill Frank depicts the topical species collected in Jacksonville.



Donax variabilis Say, 1822 [15 mm.]

Jacksonville Shell Club, Inc.
4132 Ortega Forest Drive
Jacksonville, FL 32210-5813

Editor-in-Chief: Harry G. Lee ... Email: shells@hglee.com
Managing Editor: Rick Edwards ... Email: edwar1@hotmail.com

This club meets monthly at the Southeast Branch of the Jacksonville Public Library, 10599 Deerwood Park Blvd., Jacksonville, Florida <<http://jpl.coj.net/lib/branches/se.html>>. Please address any correspondence to the club's address above. Annual membership dues are \$15.00 individual, \$20.00 family (domestic) and \$25.00 (overseas). Lifetime membership is available. Please remit payment for dues to the address below and make checks payable to the Jacksonville Shell Club. The club's newsletter and scientific journal, the *Shell-O-Gram* (ISSN 2472-2774) is issued bimonthly and mailed to an average of 15 regular members and friends by specific request and no less than ten scientific institutions with permanent libraries. An electronic (pdf) version, identical except for "live" URL's and color (vs. B&W) images, is issued the next day and sent to about 200 individuals who have demonstrated an interest in malacological research. These pdf's (ISSN 2472-2782) have also been posted to <<http://jaxshells.org/letters.htm>> since November, 1998. We encourage members and friends to submit articles for publication. Closing date for manuscript submission is two weeks before each month of publication. Articles appearing in the *Shell-O-Gram* may be republished provided credit is given the author and the *Shell-O-Gram*. As a courtesy, the editor and author should receive a copy of the republication. Contents of the *Shell-O-Gram* are intended to enter the permanent scientific record.



Festilyria festiva (Lamarck, 1811)

Pictured on the L is this iconic volute, which is endemic to the northwestern Indian Ocean. Fifty years ago, Peter Dance (1969: 90) wrote that it was "almost unobtainable, even when money was no object." In the decade that followed it was one of several iconic species which emerged from an almost mythological shroud of secretion and intrigue. Read more about this conchological renaissance in the region of the Horn of Africa beginning on the next page of this issue of your *Shell-O-Gram*.

Dance, S.P., 1969. *Rare Shells*. University of California Press, Berkeley. (1)-128 + 24 plates. [For some elaboration, see: <<http://www.jaxshells.org/rare.htm>>]

Membership Dues are payable in **September** each year.
If you're not paid up, please send in your dues: Individual \$15.00; Family \$20.00, to
Harry G. Lee, Treasurer, JSC
4132 Ortega Forest Drive
Jacksonville, FL 32210-5813

Strombus oldi - A Retrospective¹

by Harry G. Lee

I remember it well. There they were - a half-dozen wave-worn conch shells scooped from the sandy shores of the Horn of Africa. A few weeks before this momentous revelation, the American Museum of Natural History

had received some shells from the vicinity of Obbia, Somalia collected about six years earlier, and these conchs were certainly the centerpiece of the small collection.

I was a medical school freshman/volunteer worker in the Department of Living Invertebrates in the largest museum in the world, and Bill Old, the departmental scientific assistant (Collections Manager is a more apt and contemporary approximation), knew I'd be dazzled and perplexed by the contents of the drawer he had pulled out - palm-sized shells looking like ruggedly-sculpted *Strombus laciniatus* Dillwyn,



1817² (R), but with a broad chocolate stripe inside each aperture. None of the shells was spared damage from the East African surf, and the outer lip seemed to have been particularly vulnerable. While Bill (me, too) suspected this species was un-named, he pointed out, with some irony, that he couldn't place this new taxon in a genus (*Strombus* vs. *Lambis*) based on the material before us - it might or might not possess digitations on the labrum (fingers on the shell's outer lip), the feature which rather arbitrarily separates the two genera.

Over the following months, Bill's boss, [Dr. William K. Emerson](#), Associate Curator, quietly solicited a fine specimen from Mrs. Orville Davis of Philadelphia, produced a manuscript description of this conch, and sent the paper to Dr. R. Tucker Abbott, then in the Pilsbry Chair at the Academy of Natural Sciences (also Philadelphia) and founder of the nascent irregular journal *Indo-Pacific Mollusca*. Not long before the submission, Tucker had published his monograph on Strombidae in this journal, so it seemed a natural destination for Emerson's paper. *Strombus oldi* was published in a two page supplement to Tucker's monograph and was sent to *I.P.M.* subscribers, including me, on April 30, 1965. I don't remember if this act of patronymy took Bill (Old) by surprise, but I'd like to think so. To this day *Strombus oldi* Emerson, 1965 is arguably the finest and rarest Recent species in the family.

After medical school, internship, residencies, and military service, I found myself studying in Ethiopia - and I hadn't forgotten my years at A.M.N.H.! Despite a most unpropitious geopolitical scenario, I successfully negotiated visas for myself and my wife, Kitty, to visit Ethiopia's "neighbor," The Somali Democratic Republic after about six months of hassle one can only experience in the Third World. Our destination was Mogadishu, on the coast and in the range of Bill Old's Conch, a species which, by that time, had become a bona fide **holy grail** for conchologists around the world.

Well, in January, 1972 we spent a week in and around Mogadishu. Travel was restricted due to "civil unrest." (The hundreds of Red Chinese "advisors" seemed to be unencumbered by this policy, while Western



diplomats, workers, and tourists were essentially tethered to Mogadishu.) The furthest we traveled was Gezira, about 20 km. south of Mogadishu. We did plenty of snorkeling, and I was able to gather about 200 species of marine shells, including live *Cypraea marginalis* Dillwyn, 1817, a prized East African endemic, but no *S. oldi* was seen. The Somali beach boys we inevitably encountered were shown pictures of the great conch, and some seemed to recognize the shell. (All, however, volunteered to take down payments for future delivery.) Despite dozens of promising leads, neither our little colleagues nor we were able to come up with the prize species.

One of our traveling companions, the Embassy Physician in Addis Ababa, where we and he lived, took an interest in this potential international commerce. After a few more of his monthly calls in Mogadishu, he actually found a beach boy with the right stuff! Dr. Stuart Scheer brought back my first *S. oldi*. The event triggered a grand dinner party - by now most of our international circle of friends were aware of this conchological obsession and were probably glad to see it put to rest amid festivities. (There wasn't really much else of comparable import for expatriates to celebrate in Addis Ababa during the final year of Haile Selassie's dotage.)



Months later I got acquainted with [Rosavittoria Todaro](#), an Italian lady working in Mogadishu with the United Nations. I saw her name (and fascinating address!) in Tom Rice's *Of Sea and Shore* magazine and wrote her immediately. We were in frequent contact from 1972 until recently. I saw Rori become a fine conchologist during those two decades. After a little warm-up time, she got a handle on *the S. oldi* situation. The shells began coming to her by caravan from north of Mogadishu. By 1990 I reckon she had sent me four dozen fine specimens, and I exchanged them widely and profitably. *Volutocorbis rosavittoriae* Rehder, 1981 (L) is named in honor of this inspirational and industrious naturalist. It is just one of many species she brought to light.

We enjoyed a monopoly on *Strombus oldi* for a few years, but, alas, geopolitical vagaries supervened, international fisheries developed, a surge of interest in shell-collecting in Europe (particularly Italy, which had colonial ties to Somalia), and collecting across the Gulf of Aden in Oman produced a near-watershed for *S. oldi* aficionados.

At the moment, I can see my solitary magnificent specimen of Bill Old's Conch in a coffee table before me. It launches my thoughts back and forth through this one-third century saga. I see now that the marvel of discovery, the thrill of the chase, and the sharing of good fortune in fellowship are the real pleasures of this enterprise - and I begin to understand why Robert Louis Stevenson extolled my happy destiny as a shell collector. I simply regret that Bill Old isn't around to join in this brief retrospective; he really **was** with me every step of the way.

¹ In the decades since the time this report was penned Bill Old's Conch has been transferred to another genus; it is now known as *Tricornis oldi* (Emerson, 1965)

² At the time of this encounter, most of us weren't aware of the senior synonym, *Strombus sinuatus* [Lightfoot]³, 1786. That taxon is now known as *Sinustrombus sinuatus* [Lightfoot]³, 1786. [cont'd. next page]

³ The brackets indicate that the authorship was anonymous; only (much) later did scholars make attribution to Rev. John Lightfoot; see footnote 2 at <<http://www.jaxshells.org/1201hgl.htm>>.



Tricornis oldi (Emerson, 1965)

<<http://www.marinespecies.org/aphia.php?p=taxdetails&id=531849>>

The photograph on L was taken in the 1970's not long after the above chronicle went down. The late Rosavittoria Todaro [Rosavittoria Todaro](#) held the camera in Mogadishu, Somalia. This is thought to be the first published image of the living animal.

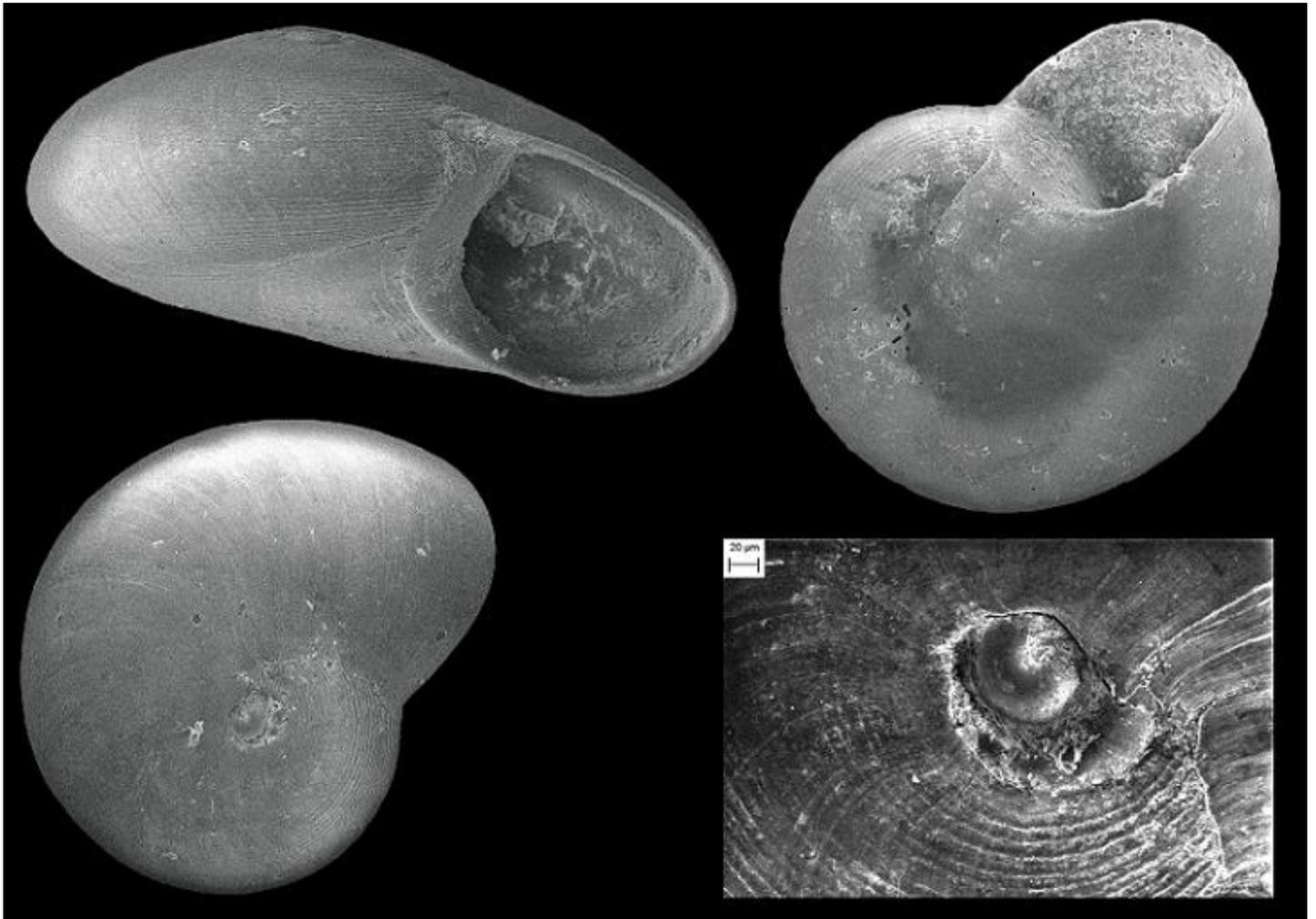
JSC Traveling Exhibit now stored at the Lees'

Harry Lee has taken over stewardship of a set of three shadow boxes populated by informatively-labeled Florida seashells (R). These were used as a traveling educational exhibit and have circulated among Jacksonville public libraries and at elementary schools over the years. Veteran JSC member Claire Newsome had been storing it and other relevant memorabilia for several years. She still has the JSC banner, fabricated by the late JSC stalwart, Elma Lee Geoffrey, and measuring about two feet by eight feet. Although a prominent part of our club heritage, it hasn't been put to use since our last shell show, in July, 2014. She also has thousands of shells, mostly the inventory of for our shell show "sand fleas" concessions, that are in need of a good home. Please contact Claire at (904) 400 1456. Her address is 3875 Copper Circle East, Jacksonville, FL 32207.



A new species of tiny *Teinostoma* from Cedar Key?

By Harry G. Lee



Rick Edwards, Paul Jones, and I have been examining some bottom material from our Cedar Key expedition of May 24, 2019, on which we reported at the July 25 club meeting. The stuff, from about one fathom deep, was mostly composed of (mollusk) shell hash and fragmented remains of branching bryozoans. Thus far, about 200 species of identifiable shells have been identified from about two-thirds of the stuff that has been culled, much of which having been sorted and organized to some degree. In the collections here are about eight species of the family Tornidae, and some of these are represented by dozens of examples. Oddly enough, although the area has been collected since the 1880's, including nearly annual field trips by the JSC over five decades, one of the most common tornid species has proven impossible to assign to a known species. Clearly a member of the genus *Teinostoma* H. Adams & A. Adams, 1853, the shells, three of which (1.12 to 1.21 mm in maximum diameter) are depicted above. The most closely related taxon seems to be *T. nesaeum* Pilsbry & McGinty, 1945, but its shell is larger, evenly biconvex (pill- vs. lens-shaped), spirally corded all over the dorsum, and it has a larger parietal callus and non-deflected aperture. It is likely future pages of the *Shell-O-Gram* will carry more news of this little stranger. SEM's done with the assistance of Dr. Ann Heatherington of the Dept. Geology, University of Florida, Gainesville.



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