



SEA BONES #3

A Newsletter on Southern African conchological matters from the desk of Roy Aiken.

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“ IT IS PERHAPS A MORE FORTUNATE DESTINY TO HAVE A TASTE FOR COLLECTING SHELLS THAN TO HAVE BEEN BORN A MILLIONAIRE “

- Robert Louis Stevenson

Society AGM

Our AGM in Pretoria on the 16 Oct 2010 was really lovely, with a good turnout and a nice number of high quality exhibits. First prize was awarded to Jelle Lammers for his exhibit entitled “PAINT MY HOUSE“. Our guest speaker, Charlie Scalliet, a highly experienced diver, presented a mass of beautiful slides of underwater marine life, with some amazing close-up shots which are his speciality. We were also given a good idea on choice of correct equipment and important tips for those wanting to try the challenge of underwater photography. We thank him once again for his time.

Enclosed herewith, for good orders sake, find the Presidents Report for 2009/2010 which was tabled at the AGM.

Book Launch

The Pretoria Group's November meeting was a highlight, taking the form of a superb cheese and wine evening to celebrate the launch of the beautiful new book, *Identification Guide to the Seashells of South Africa*, edited by Alwyn Marais and Alan Seccombe. Behind the scenes, Johan Marais has contributed a massive amount of time and effort in describing many of the families represented. He and Alwyn presented us with many interesting facts and stories relating to their journey in producing this impressive first volume. This presentation will be repeated in Durban on Saturday March 12 @ 14h00 and anyone in the area who would be interested in their story along with a laptop presentation are cordially invited to join us at the home of Markus Lussi in Durban North.

National Shell for South Africa

South Africa has several national symbols which include the national flower (King Protea), national animal (Springbok), national bird (Blue Crane), national fish (Galjoen) and the national tree (Real Yellowwood), but we do not have a national shell.

With almost 3,000 km of coastline South Africa can be regarded as a large coastal state in which the sea plays an important role in our lives. Besides the Galjoen, our national fish, we have no other marine symbol that reflects the importance and influence of the marine environment on our lives. In a recent project by the Conchological Society of Southern Africa (CSSA), we selected 5 endemic shells that occur on our coast to represent this beautiful natural resource. They are *Conus visagenus* Kilburn, 1974, *Festilyria ponsonbyi* (EA Smith, 1901), *Barycypraea fultoni fultoni* (Sowerby, 1903), *Zemiopsis papillaris* (Sowerby, 1825) and *Chicoreus fosterorum* Houart, 1989. To this end, we would like to invite fellow enthusiasts to suggest further species they believe should be included in this list. We will then provide a public forum for a vote on the matter and the results will be presented at the next AGM for confirmation. The CSSA will then approach the relevant government department to have the selected shell recognized as a national symbol. Suggestions for shell species to be added can be forwarded to alwyn@deark.co.za.

Your support in this matter would be greatly appreciated.

The Periostracum of Molluscs

Called at times the epidermis, the outer layer of the Molluscan shell affords much interest to those who want to know a little more about shells. The periostracum is a chitonous membrane covering most shells. Excreted by the mollusc, it also forms the horny material of non-calcareous operculums. It serves as a protective skin to the mollusk while it is still alive. When dead, it dries and contracts, and in time splits and flakes off the shell. In fresh-water shells it is generally heavier and more resistant to drying out. In one instance, the New Zealand *Paryohantas* has a periostracum of such strength and thickness that upon drying out, the tension generated by the shrinking causes the shell to explode.

Periostracum is however not found in families such as Cypraedae, Olividae or Marginellidae, as these use the mantle for protection and disguise. In the case of some bi-valves, lustre, colour and design is located solely in this outer skin. Besides being colourful or shiny, dull or opaque, the periostracum can also be hairy or spiny. These hairs may form symmetrically arranged tufts that follow the form of the sculpture below. Conversely in the genus *Trichotropis*, the spiny processes of the periostracum find no counterpart in the shells underneath. Collectors should try to keep one individual of each species showing this natural condition.

(Taken from the shell files of the late **Olive Peel**)



Turbonilla laffertyi with remnants of its dark periostracum.

A schedule of planned events for the year is as follows:

Pretoria Group

Contact: Maurice Evans 084 247 3054

Month	Subject
February	The formation of cowrie patterns and enamelling
March	Personal names in S.A. Conchology (cont)
April	Freaks, melanism and overglaze in shells
May	Quiz evening
June	The family Sepiidae
July	Shell fossils
August	CSSA AGM (provisionally set for Sat 13 th)
September	Law affecting the amateur shell collector
October	The family Epitonidae - methods for identification
November	My shell of interest

Durban Group

Contact: Rina Mathee 072 246 3327

Month	Subject
March 12	Book launch
May 14	Discussion of name changes

South Coast Group

Contact: Debbie King 072 506 7208

Month	Subject
February 26	Brachiopods
March 12	Book launch
May 28	Beach hazards

East London Group

East London group meets on the third Monday of each month to discuss various topics. They also plan field trips from time to time.

CONCHOLOGICAL SOCIETY OF SOUTHERN AFRICA.

PRESIDENTS REPORT FOR THE 2009/2010 YEAR

Some of us got absorbed into the excitement of World cup soccer, a massive, successful & financially controversial event, so we started “doing shells” from August again!

The Society continues in much the same vein as the last few years, with a core group of members holding meetings in Durban/South Coast KZN and Pretoria. There are gatherings in East London and an operative group in Kleinmond.

It is our intent to visit at least one other centre, probably Bloemfontein, and do a laptop/projector presentation to members in that area.

Historically, there have been concentrated phases of collecting in the world, with the well-off echelons of European society in the 1700's, and an increasing interest amongst a broader group in the mid 1800's, with a surge at the turn of the 20th century. To this end, philatelists owe the existence of tens of thousands of Penny Black stamps that were assimilated during this avid collecting period.

Without turning this into a “state of hobbies in South Africa” speech, we nevertheless have to be pragmatic about the future of ‘collecting’ worldwide, but particularly on our continent. To quote from the newsletter of the Edenvale Philatelic Society

“Our hobby is dying. So are clubs. A 5-page article in ‘*Setempe*’ mentions this state of affairs. The need is emphasised to promote our hobby at ‘youngster level’. Appointments at selected schools could be made to point out the value that could be added to the education of young people. History, geography, general knowledge, orderly thinking processes and many more facets would certainly be beneficial to young people. One could even throw in a measure of entrepreneurship since there is a certain measure of value attached to collecting stamps.”

So, what of the future?

The future involves the IT factor. To quote an old adage, ‘if you can't beat em, join em’. We lament that computers are a magnet for our youth, but an effort must be made to utilise this vehicle as an opportunity to increase awareness of our wonderful hobby. It is therefore my intent to develop an S.A. Conchsoc website, starting with the basics such as contact details, a mission statement, info on the Strandloper, membership application, and some attractive images. Next, I commend Christelle whose suggestion is to open up a facebook page for South African shell collectors to enter into informal dialogue, as a forum for identification assistance, posting of recent finds, good shelling spots, where to obtain shells, currently available literature on South African shells, etc.

To promote conchology, do we;

- Target schools? This takes time and effort, not to mention that there are hundreds of choices in this regard.
- increase activity at Science fairs
- continue to educate the local diving community
- increase our profile overseas. The overseas membership cost seems high at present.

We have produced a set of “Big Five“ mugs, choosing endemic species from different families in South Africa, to be offered for sale to raise society funds. They are launched at the AGM and will be sold subject to availability.

In the absence of an official scientific officer, we have endeavoured to keep up with new shell descriptions over the period, and record them in the Strandloper. We welcome any notification of descriptions in the future, especially from overseas institutions whose publications we may not see.

It is with excitement that we look forward to the launch of a new book, with detailed coverage of certain major families of South African gastropods. We will get our first look at it during November, and invite all who can possibly attend, to join us in celebrating its launch scheduled for the evening of November 8 this year, in Pretoria. A huge amount of effort has gone into this work, with no stone being left unturned in the search for valid species, holotypes and decent images. This will be a definitive publication on South African Mollusca for many moons to come.

We record the sad loss of two well known characters of S.A. conchology, namely Arie Jooste, and 'Hutch' Hutchison over this period, and offer condolences to their loved ones.

We do, however, have a real survivor in S.A. conchology, in the person of Val van der Walt, our current 'Grand Dame of shells', who turns 90 this month. She is thanked for her amazing contribution to the society and its members over many years.

Strandloper 287 should be out by now, and having been afforded the privilege of a preview in order to proof-read it, I would like to congratulate and thank Alwyn Marais heartily for the superb quality of this edition, once again. Current factors prohibit the release of our mouthpiece more regularly, such as availability of articles, finance, and limitations on personal time on a voluntary basis. We ask for our valued members' understanding in this regard, and ask that you keep articles flowing to the Editor.

Barbara Fouché has recently advised that she now has some time to update her marvellous work on Personal Names in Southern African Conchology, and will be creating an addendum with more than 100 new entries. We certainly look forward to this.

One of the most exciting items I could bring to the table today, is to announce an initiative, by Alwyn Marais, of the formal registration of a Section 21 company, designed in principle to safeguard the future of Southern African conchology. This far reaching concept is called "CENTRE FOR MOLLUSCAN STUDIES". The entity was born recently out of the desire to create something outside of the public sector, run by a board, and utilised for the good of all enthusiastic conchologists. We ask Alwyn to kindly give us the broader picture on this development a little later.

'Sea Bones' will continue as a less formal in-between newsletter, but plans are afoot to give it some 'cosmetics', and I look forward to sending out letter No.3 to you, early next year.

I would like to end by thanking my committee for their support and assistance where required over the last period, and look forward to the next term of shelling with keen anticipation.

Roy Aiken

President

October 2010