The Strandloper

BULLETIN OF THE CONCHOLOGICAL SOCIETY OF SOUTHERN AFRICA

No. 205 DECEMBER 1980/JANUARY 1981 Page 1

SHELLING IN THE VAAL RIVER

by

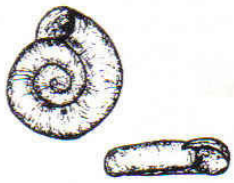
MICHAEL CORTIE

PART I: GASTROPODS

Lymnaea natalensis
length 20mm

Bulinus tropicus?
length 8mm

Succinea
length 10mm



Anisus
diameter 4mm

INTRODUCTION

The Vaal River is one of the Republic's larger rivers and is the primary source of water for the Southern Transvaal industrial complex. The river rises near Ermelo in the Transvaal and flows westward for several hundred kilometres to eventually join the Orange River at Douglas Point in the Cape Province. The river is everywhere higher than a thousand metres above sea level. Water temperature varies from a few degrees above zero during a severe winter, to well over 25° in sheltered bays in summer. The water chemistry is characterised by a relatively large quantity of dissolved solids, which are chiefly the bicarbonates of calcium and magnesium. The water therefore is relatively alkaline, typically having a pH value of 7,5 to 7,8.

Total dissolved solids range from 80 to 180 parts per million in the water reaching the upper reaches of the Vaal Dam[1].

SHELLING IN THE VAAL RIVER

The gastropods of the Vaal River are not always obvious to the casual visitor but a little patient hunting IN THE RIGHT PLACES will reveal specimens. Spring and summer are generally the more profitable seasons to search for specimens for several reasons. Firstly, during these seasons the river is warm and, in sheltered bays, supports a diversity of aquatic vegetation. This vegetation, particularly the water lilies, which are abundant along the stretch of the Vaal between Vaal Dam and the Barrage, provide the surface upon which the algae-grazing gastropods feed and reproduce. Secondly, spring is marked by a pronounced blooming in the growth of algae and waterweed. Concurrent with this upsurge in aquatic vegetation comes an explosion of snails such as **Lymnaea natalensis**.

Most of the collecting on which this article is based, was done at the property of my grandparents about 2 km upstream of the Barrage. Although this site and its nearby environs can be regarded as a fairly typical Vaal River collecting area, there are some important deviations in the molluscan fauna occuring at other localities. In particular, the Vaal River some kilometres below Parys has yielded large fine examples of our largest freshwater bivalve, **Aspatharia wahlbergi**, while that part of the river above Vaal Dam is somewhat deficient in molluscan life if we are to judge from the paper by F.M. Chutter already cited (see note 1). Chutter records the following species from forty-four stations on the Vaal and Wilge Rivers at which he collected:

i) **Gyraulus lamyi** (Ramshorn snail)
ii) **Bulinus** species (see figure)
iii) **Burnupia** species (freshwater limpet)

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TRAVELLING AND SHELLING IN FLORIDA U.S.A.

by
BETSY AND HENK SLINGERLAND
of Pretoria

Leaving Jan Smuts Airport on Friday, 2nd May, we flew to Rio De Janeiro, and after two days left Rio Sunday night for Miami, where we arrived Monday morning.

From there on we travelled the Southern part of Florida for 21 days by motorhome. A Winnebago 23 Fi Minnie Winnie, booked previously at "American Land Cruisers Inc" in Miami. By 3 o'clock that afternoon we were on the road, going south. Found a supermarket where we stocked up our stores for a few days, and discovered a very good trailer park just outside Miami with hookup facilities for water and electricity, and booked in for the night. When in the park shop next morning, the owner told me we were the first South African people to stay with them for 24 years.

We left after breakfast, destination Key West. About 15 km south following state way No 1, the upper *keys* are connected by causeways. But later we had to pass over about 40 bridges. One named Seven Mile Bridge which was the longest of them all (Luckily) because those bridges are very narrow for today's traffic.

Half-way we stopped to make some coffee and, as we were on a causeway, the Atlantic Ocean was on the left and the gulf stream on the right. Here we found our first shells on some rocks, on the Atlantic side. Quite a few **Nerita peloronta** (Bleeding tooth).

By 3 o'clock we arrived at Key West and at that time thousands of Cuban refugees were landing. There we saw Greyhound buses full of them, being taken north.

Going north again after two nights in Sugar Loaf Trailer Park near Key West, we stopped over for the night in a state park at Key Largo.

In the morning we did a trip with a boat to the coral reefs in the state reserve but decided that the coral reefs in Moçambique at Paradise Island are much more colourful and alive. We left at noon and stayed over at Homestead. Saturday morning after a short visit to The Everglades National Park we drove north on highway 41, destination Naples. On the way we did a flip in an airboat (talk about noise!). They give you cottonwool for your ears to protect your eardrums, from the terrible noise the engine makes, but the ride in the boat was very smooth, gliding in about 10 to 15 cm of water. Later we turned left from the highway to Marco Island. Found a very good Trailer Park again, and as the office was closed took a site on the Riverbank with everglades on the opposite bank. When I jumped down to the water from the fishing jetty to collect some Neritas Betsy shouted "Look out!" About 20 metres away an alligator on the other bank was looking at me. It did not take me long to climb back on the jetty. When paying our fees for the night's stay the owner told me that he had five alligators around the park, but as they don't bother people, we needn't worry about them.

Next day we stayed in the same park, went to the beach (no shells) and left Monday morning for Sanibel Island near Fort Myers.

Sanibel is connected to the mainland by three bridges and two causeways. What Jeffreys Bay is to the South African shell collector, Sanibel is for the Americans. Every year in March there is a shell sale on the island with collectors attending from all over the world. We arrived at the Periwinkle Trailer Park in the afternoon, address Periwinkle Way. Many of the streets on the island are named after shells. We were told that the living quarters of all new dwellings have to be three metres above ground level. This regulation came in after the whole of the island was flooded when hit by a cyclone during the sixties.

We went to the beach after booking into the park and found two live **Strombus pugilis** (fighting conchs) and some whelks.

Next day we bought supplies etc. and went to the beach again, but as shelling was disappointing, drove round the island which is about 16 kilometres long with many trees but very flat, with no hills at all, as was Florida everywhere we went.

Wednesday morning early our neighbour's wife came to me and asked if we had found any shells the day before? When we told her "Just some beach shells", she showed us all her live shells, found the day before next to the causeway coming in from the Mainland but as they came to Sanibel for the last seven years they knew the place very well.

We had brought about two kg of South African shells with us so we started swopping shells later that morning, when we met them again on the causeway. They were Joe and Peggy Baker, of Pittsburgh Pennsylvania and we became very friendly with them.

Peggy was the shell collector and Joe helped collecting. Shells she liked specially were patella's from South Africa. As we had booked for only two nights we took our site for three more days.

In the afternoon with the tide going out we started finding live shells ourselves and stayed there until dark – about 8 o'clock – our neighbours had a boat and had gone fishing that afternoon. We came to the Park just as they were moving in and she gave me about 20 live shells, found when they started looking for shells, as the fishing was no good.

Thursday was very warm. The hottest day so far, so we took it easy. Up till then we had collected two big **Pleuroploca gigantea** (the Florida Horse Conch) a few large **Busycon contrarium** nice **Fasciolaria Tulipa** and **Strombus pugilis** (the Fighting Conch). **Melongena corona** and quite a few other shells all alive. Friday morning the Bakers took us shelling by boat and we were very successful in finding more shells.

We spent Friday afternoon cleaning shells and packing them in a box for mailing to South Africa. After saying goodbye to the Bakers, we left Saturday morning going north again. Passed through Fort Meyers and came to what we had seen advertised on route 41 the week before as "the largest shell factory in the world". Here we saw the most beautiful shell collection we had ever seen, all behind glass of course. And they had millions of shells for sale. The smaller ones in wooden boxes, the bigger ones on glass

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SHELLING IN THE VAAL

(Continued from page 1)

iv) **Pisidium** species (very small bivalve)

v) **Corbicula africana** (bivalve)

Except for **Gyraulus**, all are found also downstream of the Barrage.

NOTES ON THE GASTROPODS FOUND

1. **Lymnaea natalensis** Krauss

This is the most common Vaal River gastropod. The occurrence of the snail and certain observations relating to it have been described in the STRANDLOPER [2, 3]. Pilsbry notes[4] that, although species of Lymnaea are normally vegetarians, all of them can at times take to a carnivorous diet. The animals have a lung and, in an aquarium, can be seen to contain a bubble of air from which they draw oxygen. Pilsbry also observes that, besides obtaining oxygen from the atmosphere, Lymnaea can also breathe through its skin which is abundantly supplied with blood vessels, provided the surrounding water contains sufficient oxygen in solution.

In the Vaal, the snail is found chiefly on the undersides of lily pads in sheltered bays where it feeds on the films of green algae. Eggs are laid in crescent-shaped jelly-like clusters of up to 20mm in length. These clusters are normally also found on the underside of the water lilies. The animal does not appear to venture deeper than about 100mm below the surface of the water. The shell is translucent and thin and can be up to 23mm long.

2. **Bulinus tropicus** (Krauss)

Species of **Bulinus** are very difficult to differentiate on the basis of shell characteristics alone (see STRANDLOPER No 115[2]). I have found a species of **Bulinus**, apparently **Bulinus tropicus**, in the Vaal but the species is a good deal less common than **Lymnaea natalensis**. Although several examples of this shell have been taken from under lily pads, it is more common on floating reeds and branches, particularly in winter. At the moment I can offer no explanation as to how the snails colonised the floating mobile branches in the first place. Specimens of this shell range from 5 to 10 mm.

3. **Burnupia** species

This unusual little shell, a freshwater limpet, was discussed recently in the STRANDLOPER[5]. It is commonly found attached to reeds in both exposed and sheltered water. Species of **Burnupia** are difficult to separate on the basis of shell characteristics and I will most definitely avoid being drawn out of my depth in this respect.

Although also a pulmonate, **Burnupia** is found as deep as 250mm underwater. An unexpected habitat was a complex of shallow interlocking pools amongst medium-sized boulders on the Vaal River some 20km downstream from the Barrage. At this locality the Burnupias were abundant. The shells range up to 6mm in size.

4. **Anisus** species

A tiny ramshorn snail of the genus **Anisus** is fairly frequently found under lily pads. The several species of Anisus in South Africa are difficult to separate and thorough scientific work might relegate them to synonymy. The live snail is brown in colour and only 4mm in diameter.

5. **Succinea** species

The several species of **Succinea** in South Africa are normally found on damp vegetation near to, but out of, water but I have taken a number of specimens in the Vaal on floating reeds and branches. The shells of these molluscs seem identical to those I have collected at such farflung places as the Victoria Falls, Messina, and Shelly Beach, Natal. Once again it is necessary with this genus for the amateur to tread warily before assigning individual shells to species described in the literature.

POSSIBILITY OF FURTHER FINDS

The gastropods described above are certainly not the only ones living in the Vaal. In addition it is quite possible that the **Bulinidae**, **Ancylidae**, **(Burnupia)** and **Planorbidae (Anisus)** that I have hound could be, and probably have been, split into several species by malacologists.

REFERENCES:

1. Chutter, F.M. "Hydrobiological Studies in the Catchment of Vaal Dam, South Africa. Part I: River Zonation and the Benthic Fauna" Int. Revue ges Hydrobiol. 55.3 1970 445–494.
2. Appleton, C.C. "Freshwater Gastropods" Strandloper No 115, Feb 1970.
3. Cortie, M.B. "Meet Lymnaea natalensis" Strandloper No 164, July 1974.
4. Pilsbry, H. "The aquatic Mollusks of the Belgian Congo" Bulletin American Museum Natural History Vol 53 1927 p 106.
5. Cortie, M.B. "Freshwater Limpets" Strandloper No 199, January 1980.

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FLORIDA

(Continued from page 2)

shelves, and the expensive shells under glass in display cabinets. We bought some inexpensive shells, walked around for about two hours and drove on again.

Sunday morning we passed over the Sunshine Skyway bridge near St Petersburg. This bridge was hit by a ship nine days before. A section of the south-going bridge deck collapsed and 31 people were killed. That night we slept at Tarpon Springs, where the sponge boats are stationed, and visited the harbour next morning.

The same morning we left the Gulf coast and turned inland for Disney world, near Orlando, where we spent two days and saw things we had never dreamed about before.

From there we came to the Atlantic Ocean near Cape Canaveral, at Cocoa beach and started driving down to Fort Lauderdale where we booked in a park for two nights.

Our last two nights before leaving from Miami airport for Boston, we stayed in one of the best trailer parks we had seen. (In Miami North).

After two weeks near Boston, with Betsy's sister we flew to Amsterdam and a week later from Holland to Jan Smuts, where we arrived on the 17th June and that was the end of 45 wonderful days.

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SOME WORDS OF WISDOM FROM THE U.S.A.

We exchange bulletins with the NATIONAL CAPITAL SHELL CLUB of Washington. That club is celebrating its 21st year and, in the bulletin for December 1980, their editor, Joe C. Hayes, has some very pertinent remarks to make about the impressions made by old club members on new ones. We quote his remarks in full:

"What does it take to convert a new club member into an "old" one? What brings the new face into the fold? It is not always the new member's pure volition that turns him into an interesting and interested Club worker. It may be more his perception of his "fit" within the membership as he evaluates it from attendance at his first meeting.

"Did you ever wonder what goes through members' minds when a new member is introduced at his first meeting? Maybe just to crane around for a fast glimpse, or join resignedly in the pitty-pat of introductory applause? Or, just maybe, to *smile* a small welcoming study of the newcomer's face while building up the determination to seek him or her out during the first intermission for a personalised welcome?

"You can well imagine what it could mean to the new member if old ones come up to him with questions that will let him tell them where he lives, where he has been, how 'shelly" he is, and the rest. He can then ask and get answers he also needs.

"Contrast two pictures: First, the meeting ends, old members clique together or around the speaker of the evening, talking with each other, while the new member, lost and ignored around the edges, finally slips away wondering if he amounted to some sort of misfit. Contrast this: More than one old member not only makes the new one welcome but also caters some to the newcomer's special interests, finding out just how interesting the new one really is.

"About the nicest thing that can happen to any new member is to be invited to 'come over and see some shells'. He may accept. If he does, once or twice, he himself will then qualify as an "old member" don't you think? And he will have learned how to act like one."

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CONUS ALGOENSIS SCITULUS

Mrs Connolly has made an interesting observation about the pigmentation on the shells of **Conus algoensis scitulus** and **simplex**. Apparently on beach specimens of these two subspecies, the differences are noticeable in that **Conus simples** tends to bleach white all over, where **scitulus** seems to retain its pattern. In other words, the inference is that the pigment on **simplex** is deposited on the top surface of the shell, while in the case of **scitulus** it permeates the shell material.

There are two implications of this phenomenon. One is that brutal shell collectors who rush to remove the periostracum of all their specimens are likely to ruin their **Conus smplex** by heavy bleaching in Jik (Serve them right, too! – Ed.). The other is that it helps to distinguish the species in such localities where the species are said to overlap, such as Cape Hangklip and Betty's Bay.

Isolated specimens of **Conus algoensis "scitulus"** have been recorded from Hangklip and it must be admitted that the pattern and shape of these shells are very convincingly like **scitulus** from Cape Agulhas. However, if the different behaviour of the pigmentation is really a valid and reliable indicator, then it might have to be accepted that the Hangklip shells are only a colour form of **simplex** which happens to approach the typical pattern of **scitulus**.

It is of course dangerous to base an identification on pigment alone, and it would be interesting to compare some other genera and species in which the patterns and colours behave in a similar fashion. Readers' observations would be appreciated.

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INCREASED MEMBERSHIP FEES

The recently increased postage rates, coupled with higher costs of printing, paper and stationery, are going to force us to increase our present modest membership fees. At the same time, we would like to promise members that we will do our best to raise the standard of the STRANDLOPER and other services. The Council will be considering the most suitable level of fees and an announcement will be made in the next month or two.

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SPECIAL PUBLICATION OUT OF PRINT

Our special publication No 2, familiarly known as "Day's Families & Genera" has been in such demand lately that our supplies have been sold out. First published in 1962, it was revised in 1977 and it might be advisable to consider a further revision before we reprint it. We know that there have been several additional genera assigned to the families of Southern African mollusca in the past few years. In fact, it is difficult to keep up with all the changes being published in local and foreign journals, and the most one can hope to do is to be sufficiently alert to remember to note those changes that affect our own records.

We will put a note in the STRANDLOPER as soon as this publication is in stock again.

BOOK REVIEW

by

F.J. SPRINGSTEEN

HAWAIIAN MARINE SHELLS by Dr E. Alison Kay; published by B.P. Bishop Museum Press, Honolulu, Hawaii. Can be ordered from Wheldon & Wesley at £17,50 or direct from the Bishop Museum at approximately $30,00.

This extremely interesting book is Section 4 in a series of works on Hawaiian marine fauna. The original single volume was published in 1933 and the section on mollusca was but a part of the original work. The release of this updated section on the mollusca is most timely as there has been a significan gap in works covering the malacofauna of the North Eastern Pacific.

Dr Kay is well known in Hawaiian malacological circles and no-one could be better qualified to undertake the revision and updating. The book is larger than we have come to expect. There are 653 pp. including index and corrigenda. The first section deals with the ecology, distribution, historical and fossil aspects. The next section covers the mollusca proper. The various sections are clearly and concisely set out from the ORDER level, right down to SUB-FAMILY. Descriptions of species are concise and accurate, with authors and dates. Synonyms are listed. The majority of plates are in black and white but the detail is excellent. Of special interest is the excellent treatment of the family OMALOGYRIDAE. This small neglected family is featured with detailed photographs of the several Hawaiian species, obviously taken with a low powered Scanning Electron Microscope. Regretably, Genus authors are not mentioned.

Two sections under the Gastropods which deserve special mention are those on the TRIPHORIDAE and TURRIDAE. These two families are among the most interesting to study and also among the hardest. Dr Kay's text and photographs are a real help. There are several species in both families apparently not covered by Cernohorsky in his last two books. Another interesting point is the occurence of the Cerithiid **Scaliola bella** in Hawaiian waters. This species is recorded from Durban so it seems it has a truly extensive distribution.

As in most publications with a large field to cover, mistakes invariably occur. Amont those noted in this book are:

1. The use of **Leptothyra** Pease 1869 which is a synonym for **Homalopoma** Carpenter 1864 (p. 56).
2. The use of **Schwartziella** Nevill 1881 as a genus. This should be a subgenus of **Rissoina** d'Orbigny 1840. (pp. 85–86).
3. The placement of several species in the Family **Eratoidae** needs revision both on a family and generic level. Interested collectors should consult Crawford Cate, 1979: A Review of the Triviidae, and also Crawford Cate, 1977: A Review of the Eratoidae.
4. **Drupella elata** Blainville 1832 is a synonym of **Drupella cornus** Roeding 1798.
5. **Maculotriton bracteatus** (Hinds) 1844 is a synonym for **Maculotriton serriale** (Deshayes in Laborde & Linant) 1834.
6. **Engina albocincta** Pease 1860 is a **Cantharus.**
7. **Macteola segesta** Chenu 1850 is a synonym for **Macteola interrupta** Reeve 1846.
8. **Daphnella ornata** (hinds) 1840 is a synonym for **Daphnella (Daphnella) lymneiformis** (kiener) 1840.

Several other corrections may probably crop up from time to time but they are really of little importance.

The sections on Nudibranchs and Bivalves are also well covered. There are only two or three colour plates that are very interesting and show live marine animals in their natural habitats. The colour plates on various Octopus species are particularly striking.

At the end of this monumental work is a very concise selection of authors and their relevant works. The index is also concise and accurate.

In summary, Dr Kay's book is an incredible feat to say the least. She has covered all known Hawaiian molluscan species, and has in many cases named species hitherto undescribed. The book fills a large gap in literature describing Indo-Pacific mollusca, namely the North Eastern Pacific region. It is a book that all serious conchology students should try to obtain, as it will definitely prove indispensible. The price may be a little high, but concise reference texts never come cheap.

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NODULOSE COWRIES

Mr N.L. Webb of Lusikisiki raises an interesting point, or maybe a rash of white spots, about the two cowries, **Cypraea limacina** and **Cypraea staphylaea.**

They are described in most of the references as having distinct nodules on the dorsum but it is quite common to find fresh and apparently adult specimens (judging from the full development of the aperture and the labial teeth) with white spots on the dorsum and no trace of nodules.

Burgess suggests ("The Living Cowries") that a smooth dorsum is a feature of young shells. It would be interesting to share readers' observations as to whether the development of dorsal nodules necessarily follows the thickening of the base with its labial teeth, or whether the nodules sometimes develop earlier. I suspect that it could happen in either way.

Mr Webb also comments on the paragraph in issue No 197 about **Cypraea ziczac.** Mr Eric Haywood had mentioned that he had noted the apparent rarity of specimens with two instead of three bands of chevrons across the dorsum, at least as far as Tanzania is concerned. Mr Webb has found a good number of these two-banded specimens on the Transkei coast, showing that this feature occurs over a wide area. Again, reference to Burgess produces the comment that specimens vary a great deal in the way the chevrons traverse the dorsum, even on one single reef.

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We would welcome any article of interest to Shell Collectors for future publication.

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ROUND THE GROUPS

All the coastal groups are busy with their contributions to the Members' Handbook, compiling check lists, maps of shelling sites, local regulations, nature conservation notes, etc.

PORT SHEPSTONE: Concern was expressed as the possible effects of the stripping of seaweed by the local population on the beach at Mzambe in Transkei and it was decided to write to the appropraite Transkei government department about it.

PORT ELIZABETH: Identification meetings have been held as usual.

EAST LONDON: Meetings were held as usual with a recess in January.

PRETORIA: Since our A.G.M. the group meetings held every month were devoted to discussions of the endemic S.A. Shells on a family basis. Members had to bring their specimens of the family along for checking of names and a show of hands revealed how many of each species was brought along. Very interesting "new" species turned up as good specimens were available for comparison. There were never less than 100 specimens per family available, in fact with some up to 17 species were brought along. At the same time exhibits of the family under discussion were displayed by members. The judging of these were done by every person present and the exhibit with the highest number of points were placed first. The support at these meetings for exhibits were good and the shells brought along in many cases of an excellent quality. Arie Jooste and John Hoffman participated very eagerly in all the discussions to describe the shells.

The last meeting of the year 1980 was held for the first time in the new Educational Hall of the National Zoological Gardens and the exhibition of shells in the identical exhibition boxes made by Han Vandenberg proved to be a great success. The meeting was followed by light snacks and dry wines brought along by the members.

CAPE TOWN: Following the last meeting of 1980 held at the beginning of December, the Group held a braai at the home of Branch Chairman, Bobby Botes, at Durbanville. Meetings resume in February.

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EXCHANGES WANTED

Mr H.H. Dijkstra, Gravinneweg 12, 8604 CA Sneek, Holland, collects Pectinidae and would also like to acquire any literature on S.A. Pectinidae. Members who can supply references to Museum Annals please note.
Miss Jill Ryder, 51 Ley Hill Rd., Four Oaks, Sutton Coldfield, West Midlands B75 6TF, England, offers shells from Britain, the Mediterranean and Florida, with good locality data.
Clarice Connolly, 45 Monton Rd., 7764 Kenwyn, wants land snails.
Mr J. Trondle, B.P. 1753, Papeete, Tahiti, offers Polynesian shells for world-wide species. Is interested in Mitridae.
Mrs R. Willington, 34 Queen St., Reservoir, Victoria 3037, Australia, is interested in Mitridae, Cymatiidae, Muricidae, Cassidae and Bivalves and offers intertidal and dredged specimens from Queensland and Western Australia.
Mr Claudio Piredda, Via Peralba 4, 00141 Roma, Italy, offers Mediterranean species for South African shells.

Duikerprint, C.T.