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#### FRONT PAGE

Cochlitoma limitanea (Van Bruggen 1984) found in forest above Fraser Gorge, Mbotyi

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Coastal forest off Port St Johns

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# ROAD TRIP A route worth taking

# Landshell expedition to Transkei and the Drakensberg

In February a small group from the Society travelled via KwaZulu Natal and the Drakensberg to the Transkei to collect landshells. The focus was to be on the genera gulella and cochlitoma.

By Ken Brown and Maurice Evans

ur first port of call was in the south of KZN at Trafalgar, where the rains of the day before had made conditions ideal for collecting. After a short walk on the shell-less beach, we searched the littoral dunes for landshells and found worn specimens of *Cochlitoma semigranosa* (Pfeiffer, 1861). Worn specimens of *Cochlitoma semidecussata* (Pfeiffer, 1846) have also been found in the area on previous excursions. The coastal forest and residential properties abounded with *Achatina immaculata* Lamarck, 1822, and a local reported removing bucket-loads of live animals from his garden.

Exploring the coastal bush at an elevation of about 150m above sea-level led us to find both live and dead specimens of *Gulella kraussi* (Pfeiffer, 1855). This represents an extension of the known range of this species from its previously known southernmost limit of the Umgeni River area south of Durban, to close to the Transkei border.

As with many landshell records, distribution and indeed general shell information is often based on the imprecise collection methods of early collectors. Our knowledge and understanding of conchology expands enormously through the active investigation of collectors who closely record and identify species and their distribution.







Another aspect that was clear throughout the trip is that there should be no pre-conditions as to where one should expect a particular species to be found. The area in which the *Gulella kraussi* (Pfeiffer, 1855) were found was in materially disturbed secondary forest surrounded by residential dwellings, in sandy



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Nice view down the river valley towards Port St. Johns. soil with a light litter covering. Undoubtedly the specimens were from original forest, but concentrated in a small area. A search of the remnant indigenous forest would undoubtedly yield more specimens.

Travelling along the N2 southwards from Durban, one could not help but be struck by the ongoing isolation of very patchy remnant forest surrounded by agriculture, primarily sugar-cane. The realisation was forceful that we are very close to the end days of many species whose home for millennia has been these forest habitats, from the lowly land-shell through to birds, insects, butterflies, reptiles and

animals. The survival of these remnant forests lies in the custodianship of private landowners to a large extent, and on their goodwill to preserve the small remaining fragments of forest. These are mostly in steep gorges and gullies near rivers and this probably has been the only reason for their survival. An in-depth investigation of these remnant forests would no doubt still produce some eye-popping finds.

We travelled on towards Mbotyi in the Transkei, with a stop at the lovely Magwa Falls, situated on the property of a somewhat run-down teaplantation. The dramatic falls were surrounded by a significant stretch of bush, the Egoso Forest. This beckoned as being the absolutely ideal habitat for landshells, with podocarpus and many other indigenous trees. Yet despite our most diligent efforts the only significant find was live large specimens of the critically endangered Natalina beyrichi (Von Martens, 1890). The live animal is easy to identify with its beautiful bright salmon to orange coloured foot and mantle. During our stay in Transkei we found live specimens of this species in forest areas from Mbotyi to Port St Johns. In many of the scattered





#### TOP

The group, Anton Groenewald, Roy Aiken, Maurice Evans, Ken Brown

#### BOTTOM

a lovely live pinwheel shell, *Trachycystis scolopendra* Melvill and Ponsonby, 1903 remnant coastal forests the soil is of a deep gray claylike composition, which is extremely glutinous when wet. However it is enormously turned over by massive earthworms, which leave large mounds of processed soil. It is likely that carnivores such as the Rhytididae prey on these earthworms. There is a general presumption that the Achatinidae are herbivores, but finding specimens in this glutinous muddy soil with relatively little litter cover leads one to also surmise that they are feeding either on the earthworms or on the mucous produced by their diggings. This was particularly true of our finding of live Cochlitoma limitanea (Van Bruggen, 1984) in these soil areas in indigenous forest near Silaka Nature Reserve near Port St Johns.

Mbotyi one encounters large swathe of а indigenous forest, and we explored the area above the Fraser gorge. Apart from more live Natalina bevrichi (Von Martens. 1890), we found live Cochlitoma limitanea Bruggen, 1984)(Van on the stems of trees at about a metre above the ground. It was unclear if the snails were feeding off the trees or whether they had climbed the trees to avoid predation by small wild animals. It has been previously observed by Maurice that certain Achatinas do seem to feed off of material on the surface of tree limbs. The remains of broken shells were far more visible than intact shells, but were still uncommon. Longdead Cochlitoma kilburni Mead. 2004 were also found in the forest, but what was also clear was

But back to Mbotyi. Just before the descent into

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# Our last few days in Transkei

that specimens were thinly-spread.

Diligent searching of leaf litter did not yield any gulella specimens, and the thick pasty soil did not seem conducive to their existence. The only find was in coastal dunes of *Gulella umzumvubuensis* Burnup, 1925 and *Gulella phyllisae Burnup*, 1925. Our search also yielded an abundance of *Maizania wahlbergi* (Benson, 1852), whilst the species *Opeas florentiae* (Melvill and Ponsonby, 1901) and *Opeas terebraeformis* Connolly, 1923 were also reasonably common.

The area north of the Umzimvubu River in Port St Johns yielded many fine live specimens of *Gulella umzimvubuensis* Burnup, 1925, whilst the south bank yielded Cochlitoma kilburni Mead, 2004 and specimens of *Gulella adamsiana* (Pfeiffer, 1859), *Gulella umzimvubuensis* Burnup, 1925, *Gulella puzeyi* Connolly, 1939 and *Gulella instabilis* (Sturany, 1898) on the lower reaches on the lighthouse road. Eduoardia spadicea (Pfeiffer, 1846) and Eduoardia natalensis (Pfeiffer, 1846) were also reasonably common, as was the ubiquitous Tropidiphora ligata (Muller, 1774). Several specimens of the sinistral cask shells Fauxulus pereximius (Melvill and Ponsonby, 1897), with their characteristic stupa-shaped protoconches and complex apertural dentition, were also found.

In the area around Silaka we found fine live specimens of *Cochlitoma limitanea (Van Bruggen, 1984)*, with a very dark-coloured shell, and specimens of *Cochlitoma kilburni* Mead, 2004. The forests of Silaka yielded fine specimens of *Gulella albersi* (Pfeiffer, 1855) and *Gulella adamsiana* (Pfeiffer, 1859), as well as a lovely live pinwheel shell, *Trachycystis scolopendra* Melvill and Ponsonby, 1903.

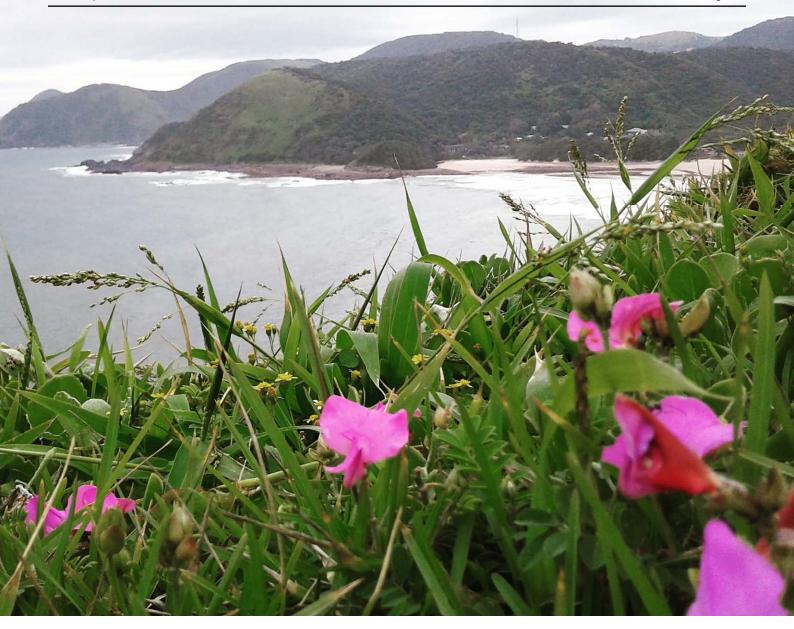
Reference to the Ingeli forest for specimens of *Gulella* can be found frequently in literature, but our arrival coincided with torrential rains, and once again the glutinous mud of the forest combined with monumental earthworm diggings proved less than ideal for the discovery of gulellas. However



**TOP** Opeas florentiae (Melvill & Ponsonby, 1901)

#### BOTTOM

Opeas terebraeformis Connolly, 1923



we found live *Cochlitoma granulata* (Krauss, 1848) and *Natalina beyrichi* (Von Martens, 1890). Our last stop before the Drakensberg was to an area near Oribi gorge near the Umzimkulu Lime Works and Marble Delta inland from Port St Johns. We were in search of the elusive *Gulella salpinx Herbert, 2002* with its very narrow range, but mine officials would not allow us access to their property where the critically endangered species is found. However the neighbouring gorge yielded specimens of *Gulella albersi* (Pfeiffer, 1855) and *Gulella calopasa* (Melvill and Ponsonby, 1903), as well as the minute species *Gulella tripodium* Connolly, 1939.

Our final short stop was at Champagne Castle, where the forest floor yielded fresh specimens of *Cochlitoma omissa* (Van Bruggen, 1965). In the neighbouring podocarpus forest of Cathedral Peak a previous expedition had found superb specimens of *Cochlitoma montistempli* (Van Bruggen, 1965).

Third beach and Silaka Nature Reserve in Port St Johns.

The trip made it clear to us all that the existing texts on our landshells, whilst excellent introductions, remain quite vague in certain areas. This was especially so as regards the Achatinidae where Herbert and Kilburn's Field Guide to the land snails and slugs of Eastern South Africa is often quite non-specific in its description of species and makes

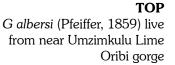


allowances for many overlaps and inconsistencies. The publication by A R Mead in 2004 of A Comparative reproductive anatomy in the South African giant land snails (Gastropoda:Pulmonata: Achatinidae), by resurrecting the nomen Cochlitoma as a genus to cover almost all South African Achatinidae, has muddled the waters and a clear review of the genus and of all South African species is sorely needed.

Our incredibly rich and diverse terrestrial landsnail fauna is a treasure few know or care to take the time to discover, and it is disappearing silently and quickly as huge shopping malls and townhouse complexes swallow and destroy for ever the richness of our eco-systems that have silently gone about their cycles of life for millennia.

Champagne Castle Image: Kevin Trench





**BOTTOM** Maizania wahlbergi (Benson, 1852)







C. montistempli (Van Bruggen, 1965) from Cathedral Peak



C. omissa (Van Bruggen, 1965) from Champagne Castle



C. limitanea (Van Bruggen, 1984) Forest above Fraser



C. granulata (Krauss, 1848) from near Silaka, Port St Johns



G. adamsiana (Pfeiffer, 1859) from Port St Johns Lighthouse Rd



G. albersi (Pfeiffer, 1855) Silaka Nature Reserve



G. calopasa (Melvill and Ponsonby, 1903) from near Umzimkulu Lime Works



G. umzimvubuensis Burnup, 1925, North bank, Port St Johns

G. tripodium Connolly, 1939 from near Umzimkulu Lime Works, Oribi Gorge



G. albersi (Pfeiffer, 1855) from near Umzimkulu Lime Works



G. instabilis (Sturany, 1898) from Pt St Johns



G. puzeyi Connolly, 1939 from Port St Johns



#### 1905 - 1933, Glenmore beach , Natal South Coast.

By Henk Smit.



If you wondered where all the coal and cinder on your local xenophoras originated from, *The Nightingale* might be one of the sources.

The Nightingale was a South African trawler that ran aground in fog in January 1933. This vessel was propelled by a two cylinder steam powered engine driving a single screw. It was built by Hall, Russel & Co Ltd, Aberdeen in 1905. Irvin & Johnson Ltd used *The Nightingale* as a fishing trawler from 1914 after it was purchased from Lewis, John & Sons that was also based in Aberdeen and owned the ship from 1905. The crew of 11 all survived when the trawler was lifted by strong seas onto the rocks at Munster / Glenmore. The cargo of fish was sold to bystanders and the wreck was purchased by John Henry Velkoop. After he sold the coal, all salvageable parts were transported by ox wagon to his house that was just up the hill. He used the mast as a lookout point to spot the sardine run from the crow's nest.

When you walk down to the beach and you can still see a part of the hull, shafts and the boiler on the beach. The beach is also littered with stunning shells. The rudder and propeller can be viewed in front of Kinderstrand (S31°00'37.7" E30°15'09.3")



Glenmore beach



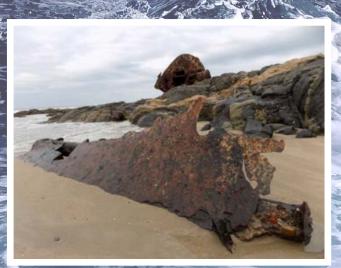
Boiler & part of the hull still "On the rocks"



Ivan "No fear" Van Der Merwe



Thick copper bush still shiny since 1933



Remainder of hull and shafts with boiler in the background



The propeller and rudder displayed at Kinderstrand



Entrance with an image of The Nightingale



1960's: Fairly intact hull



Googlemaps - Note the boiler – centre on the rocks

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# **My Interest in Shells**

#### By Gordon Webster

 $\mathcal{M}$ y interest in shells began a long time ago. I was lucky enough to have grown up in the South Coast town of Margate.

When I was really young, about the age of 5, I could hear the waves cracking as they broke on certain quiet nights. I can remember the sirens going off when there was a shark attack on Margate Beach and my father was one of the first on the scene when a young Julia Painting was taken.

The shark attacks affected my grandmothers' business: she owned the La Garde Hotel and as a result holiday makers found alternate holiday destinations for a few years and my Grandmother lost her hotel.

When I was about 10 years old I started going regularly to the beach. The professional lifesaver and first shark mesher of the off-shore nets was Aubrey Cowan, and his son Gary was my best friend. We just used to go up on the rocks on the Margate point and while looking for sinkers in the rockpools, I can clearly remember finding a live *Erosaria caputserpentis*. What a find ! I had noone else to share my excitement with, no-one else seemed interested and I kept that shell for many years.

Being friendly with the shark mesher's son, I got to help clean the jaws of the sharks that were caught in the nets. Blue pointers (Great Whites), Mako, Zambezi, Ragger tooth and Tiger sharks were frequently caught, and I would always have a shark's tooth around my neck.

As I grew older, I became interested in surfing, and it was only when I would go down to Jeffries Bay that I started to notice shells again. I just loved the Cape sea urchin or green pumpkins *Parechinus angulosus* and collected all sizes of the beautiful Haliotis spadicea.



Many years later we were fortunate enough to use my brother in law's flat at Munster. It was there, walking on the beach, that I discovered the thrill of finding little treasures washed up on the beach.

I introduced our children to my new-found love and offered them R 5,00 for every cowrie they found. At the end of the holiday, on our last evening at the Coast, we would all go down to the beach and I would throw all the shells that we had found back into the sea. I had seen many shells lying in supermarket plastic bags in someone's garage and felt it was a shame to see something so beautiful, forgotten about in a garage.

What I enjoy about shell collecting is the joy of finding something special. To me it is like finding a precious stone. To walk along the beach and pick up a lone cowrie just washed up is so exhilarating I also find it extremely recreational and satisfying. Even in the wind or light rain I enjoy walking on the beach looking for my next treasure.

Joining the Pretoria Shell Club has been a real eye opener to me. To meet fellow shell enthusiasts has been encouraging and to make new friends has been a privilege. Each members' enthusiasm for shells has been such a challenge to Elizabeth, our youngest daughter, and me, and of course their knowledge about shells has just blown me away every Monday evening meeting.

I am constantly amazed at the beautiful shells that are found along our Coast, and each time at the Club, I see shells that I have never seen before. I believe it is good to have a hobby or interest, and I look forward to many, many more adventures along our Coast, of looking for a new treasure.







*Nucella squamosa* usually is a rather uniform species in terms of colour, and presents in varying shades of tan-brown. However, on a recent dive trip to the Cape, I collected a few specimens from several dive sites in False Bay at depths of 16 - 22m where they formed small colonies on high profile reef. Some of these had colourful orange apertures combined with the more-commonly seen white and brown body. It was a joy to find these colours in the cold Cape waters, although only a few individuals showed these traits.

As noted by Kilburn and Rippey, they were mostly covered in colonies of the commensal hydroid *Hyractinia altispina* Millard 1955, apparently unknown from any other habitat. Although dried specimens with this hydroid left *in situ* are "prickly" (as indicated in Kilburn and Rippey), in life underwater they look like fluffy small bushes, orange-brown in shallow water, more brown in deeper waters due to colour absorption, and they are fairly slippery to hold. Upon drying, this gives rise to the dark brown prickly "pseudoperiostracum" seen in collections where the "periostracum" is retained.

The Hyractinia are hydrozoan polyps usually found on shells, with or without hermit crabs. with thin tubelike bodies that attach to the shell. They function as an interdependent colony, with some individuals responsible for feeding from the surrounding water, whilst others exist only for reproduction, and others have no mouths, and probably for protection, presumably rendering the nucellas unpalatable for predators.

In the superb new book by George and Margo Branch of UCT, "Living Shores – Interacting with southern Africa's marine ecosystems", they note an interesting finding: Nucella squamosa lay their eggs in egg capsules (see photo above of a group of N squamosa on egg capsule mass), each of which contains a number of eggs. However, the first-born often cannabilise their kin inside the capsule – making for a seemingly merciless but highly effective start of getting ahead in the race for survival.

In an interesting parallel, (see *Coastal Fishes of Southern Africa* by Phil and Elaine Heemstra), our ragged-tooth sharks, the equivalent of undersea Labradors along our coastline (i.e. toothy but usually with non-aggressive behaviour towards divers) demonstrate a similar trait – they bear live young and the first to hatch then proceeds to devour their smaller siblings and unhatched eggs "in utero" (*i.e.* still inside the mother). Very different marine creatures with similar evolutionary survival traits!





Nucella squamosa (Lamarck,1816) 42 mm, East False Bay



37 mm, West False Bay

45 mm, West False Bay





34 mm, East False Bay



41.8 mm, East False Bay



42.7 mm, East False Bay



45 mm, East False Bay

## How to become a famous amateur malachologist - for a while



I have got it right in front of me – a recipe for fame and glory in the scientific world! I am referring to the article of Benjamin Jones entitled, A few bad scientists are threatening to topple Taxonomy. The article deals with the current debate on taxonomy in herpetology, a field which includes thousands of undescribed species, and is therefore equally applicable to malacology. It is well worth reading and can be found at **Smithsonian.com** 

In order to succeed in becoming famous you have to master a technique other people see as a special kind of scientific "crime" called taxonomic vandalism. Taxonomic vandals are defined in the paper as: "those who name scores of new taxa without presenting sufficient evidence for their finds. Like plagiarists trying to pass off others' work as their own, these glory-seeking scientists use others' original research in order to justify their socalled discoveries." If you are a person who wants to name everything, so that you can go down in history as having named hundreds of species, this is the way to go about it. If a person wants to name a newly discovered species a few steps have to be taken. One must have enough material to be able to gather sufficient convincing evidence that one is dealing with something new to science. Next, a paper must be written, giving a full description of the specimen, pointing out in detail how it differs from everything else, and finally, the paper must be sent off to a scientific journal for publication.

Taxonomic vandals have ingenious ways of finding material to describe. One of the most common ways is simply to steal information from phylogenetic trees. Phylogenetic trees are often published and show how different animals or plants are related to each other based on their genetic makeup, and often contain "candidate" species which researchers still intend describing. On finding this information vandals quickly describe these species as their own.

Another popular way is based on a theory called "allopatric speciation", or the development of new

species through geographic isolation. Over time isolated populations can become separate species, and I quote, "This is a widely accepted theory, but not proof in itself. Without DNA samples and a detailed examination of several individuals from each population, it's not so much a discovery as it is a clue". Taxonomic vandals take full advantage of this theory to find and name "new species". They will search for geographic barriers that separate the distribution range of an existing species, such as mountains, rivers or even populations of the same species isolated from one another in protected bays along the same coastline. If the species looks slightly different in colour, pattern or form on either side of the barrier, vandals will automatically declare them separate species, says Benjamin Jones.

When describing a new species a full description of the specimen, pointing out in detail how it differs from any other known species, is required. In this respect vandals are notoriously vague in an attempt to conceal the fraud. Instances are known where unethical amateur malacologists named new species with hardly more than a photograph as evidence.

Publishing the paper on your newly found specimen is difficult at times, but there are many loopholes for vandals to exploit. The rules for naming a new animal species are governed by the ICZN, but their official Code does not actually require peerreviewing. You can virtually scribble down a vague description and give a name to your new find on a paper napkin in your favourite restaurant, and the rest of the whole world that follows the Code is bound to accept whatever it is you have described. According to one scientist: "As long as you create a name, state intention that the name is new, and provide just the vaguest description of a species, the name is valid," and that leaves the door wide open for what is called: self-publishing. Taxonomy is the only field of science allowing people to selfpublish.

Real scientists always try to publish in peer-reviewed journals, because it is a means of self-education and a measure of the ethical and scientific standard of their research. Due to the loophole in the system, vandals can avoid peer-reviewed journals, start their own journals or even write their own books where they can churn out names of "new species" that have no scientific merit and only clutter up the scientific literature. Vandals are fully aware of the fact that their new names will not stand the test of time and will sooner or later be demoted to the synonomy list. Since that can happen to the best of taxonomists, it is of little concern to unethical vandals, because once their names are taken up into the taxonomic record, they remain there for ever.

Vandals damage the credibility of science, but more importantly, many researchers are hesitant to publish or present research data at scientific meetinge or congresses in fear of their research data being scooped. This has a bad effect on scientific progress, because congresses are the main venues where scientist communicate and exchange ideas in their endevours to further science.

Vandals are an embarrasment to the societies or institutes they belong to, and to the scientific world as a whole. They are frowned upon by honest scientists and will sooner or later find themselves isolated from the scientific community. Some scientists feel so strongly about it that, although it is against the rules of the Code, they recommend that all names vandals produce should be rejected, even those that comply with the Code. The whole debate revolves around scientific integrity, which some do not seem to care much about, probably because they have none.

#### Willem van Tonder

## Phaxas decipiens (E.A. Smith, 1904)

An uncommon member of the bivalve family Cultellidae

#### Johan Marais & Alwyn Marais

Members of the Cultellidae are shallow burrowers in clean or muddy sand and resemble small, curved *Solen* (razor clams). In the genus *Phaxas* there are 4 species known from Southern Africa, and one of those, *Phaxas decipiens*, occurs from Namibia to the Eastern Transkei, burrowing in soft mud just below low-tide level and down to about 100 m. However, due to its fragility it is seldom found intact when washed ashore.

The slightly curved shell is transparent-white with growth-lines and a smooth, light-brown periostracum. The hinge is situated well posterior to the middle of the shell and bears some interesting peg-like teeth. Shell grows to 57 mm in length.

Langebaan Lagoon appears to be a good locality for finding them. During September and October specimens in absolutely fresh condition washed ashore along the northen end of the Langebaan main beach.

