The Strandloper
BULLETIN OF THE CONCHOLOGICAL SOCIETY OF SOUTHERN AFRICA

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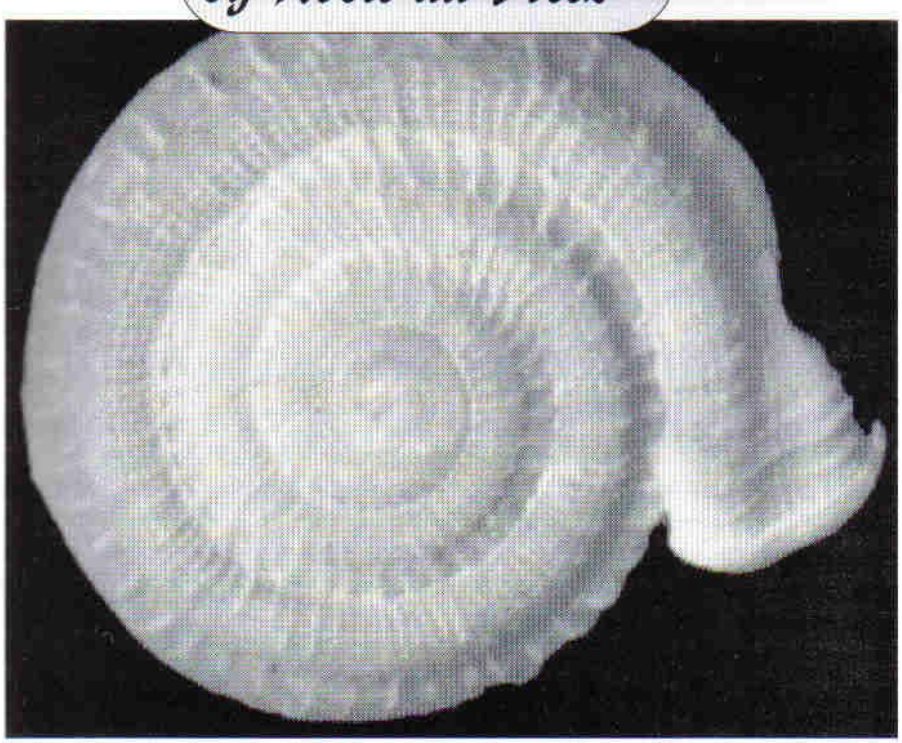
Shelling in Northern Namibia

by Kobie du Preez



Sculptaria pretiosa Zilch, 1952,Gommadommi, near Purros, diameter = 6.9 mm

As avid 4x4 enthusiasts and nature lovers we try to do a 3-week safari each year during the July school holidays. Hours of planning go into bush safaris, as most of the places we visit are very remote and undeveloped. There are usually places where you can stock up on supplies, but for this trip we had to carry all our food, water and fuel for 2 of the 3 weeks.

Our itinerary in July 1998 took us through Botswana up to the Okavango, then into Namibia and south to Etosha, from there north-west to Kaokoland and Damaraland, then eastwards to Namibia's Bushmanland and from there back to Pretoria.

Okavango

It was my second visit to the Okavango region, and I knew that *Lanistis ovum* (Peters, 1845) and *Pila occidentalis* (Mousson, 1887) could be found there. We camped at Shakawe Fishing Lodge in Botswana for one night and went on an early morning boat trip. The lodge was only a stopover, as the Kaokoland was our destination. Sadly for me I didn't find a single specimen and was very much disappointed at the time. I saw the Pel's Fishing Owl though, which was a lifer (That is a birding term learnt on the trip!). My sister and her husband feel about birds the way I feel about shells, and on this safari we learnt a lot form each other. Shakawe Fishing Lodge is a very beautiful place and is really to be recommended. We pitched our tents on the banks of the Okavango with an indigenous forest adjacent to stroll in for birding (And I'm sure shelling if you have sufficient time!!). You have to keep your eyes open, as there are elephant and other wildlife. We saw fresh elephant dung and spoor. Apparently they browsed in the area during morning hours. The river banks are steep and with flat dogs basking in the sun, it was impossible to reach the water.

Rundu

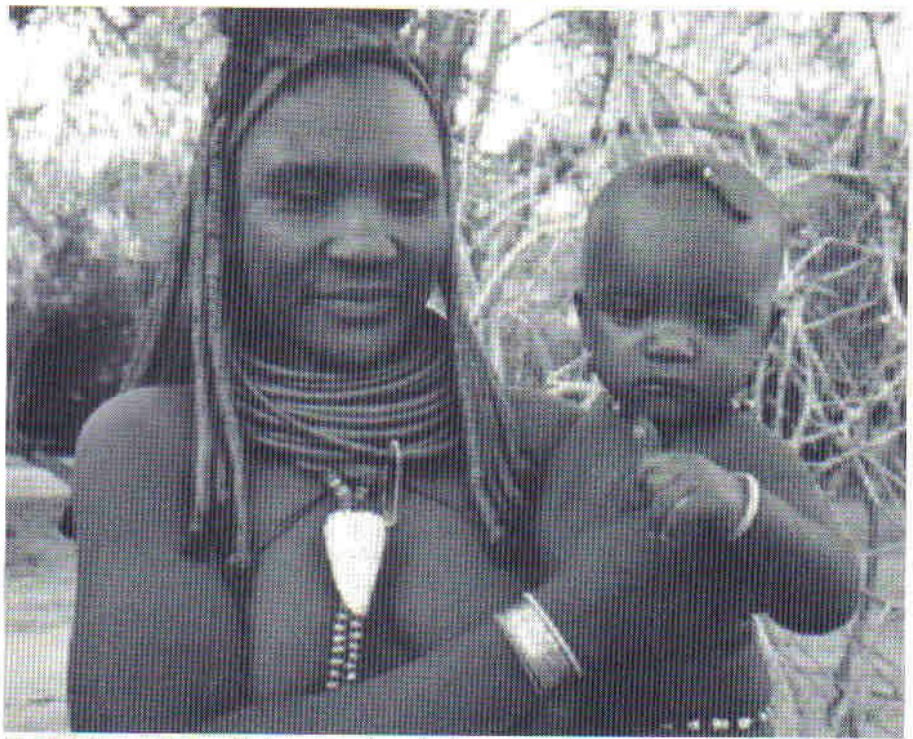
Our next stopover was Rundu. We camped in a community campsite with clean ablutions and COLD showers. Again we were on the banks of the

Okavango, but when we arrived it was late already and with the croc's around it was not safe to go near the water on foot. While preparing supper my kids came running with the news that they found a bag full of snails in a tree. It was five average sized *Pila occidentalis* (Mousson, 1887), and with them were a fishing line and hook. It clearly belonged to one of the local fishermen. We asked around to find the owner, as I didn't want to take it without permission. After I found him, I swopped it for naartjies that were enjoyed by the man and his family. He said that they use the snails as bait. My first shells for the holiday!!! Fortunately we own a very good camp freezer, and I could freeze it without having to worry for the next weeks to come about nasty smells and 'goo' in a bag. I find that plastic peanut butter or jam bottles work very well in the freezer for shells. Do not thaw it with the snails still inside though, the stench is absorbed into the plastic.

We restocked our supplies at Tsumeb and after a good rest at the municipal campsites headed for Etosha.

Etosha

We arrived at Etosha late afternoon with about half an hour's sunshine left. Mike Cortie told me beforehand that there are shells waiting to be found in Etosha, but he didn't say where and what, just that a friend picked up shells on a koppie. We were to stay in the Halali-camp and when we approached the camp I knew that it had to be there... Halali is situated on a koppie where you can safely stroll as there is a fenced water hole. Viola!! I felt like a kitten in cream heaven and in that half an hour before sunset picked up 5 different species, *Pupoides calaharicus* (Boettger, 1886), *Gastrocopta damarica* (Ancey, 1888), *Microstele noltei* (Boettger, 1886), *Achatina sp.* and an unknown small species. It was quite interesting to see the other tourist's faces staring at me and my kids scratching around in the ground! The shells are very brittle from exposure to the sun, especially the micro's.



OvaHimba woman with her *ohumba* whole-cone necklace. Note also the ochre, fat and bead head-dress and neck ornament.

Kaokoland

From Etosha we headed north and true to the Kaokoland region we came across several OvaHimba kraals. Shells play a very important part in the lives of the OvaHimba. The women wear *ozonhumba*[1] (necklaces with cone shells) around their necks. They are highly valued and are passed down from mother to daughter. Shells used to be part of a trading network with Angola. This was disrupted by the war and high prices - a young goat or sheep - are now paid for cones. Married men wear a large *ombongoro*[2] of shells from the Angolan coast to protect their necks from the harsh sun and to signify their marital status.

At certain ceremonies the Himba women wear ceremonial *ozondikwa*[3] (baby carriers) made from leather, which are decorated with cowries and red and white beads. They are also highly valued and passed down from mother to daughter. The cowries are from the Angolan coast and the beads from Portuguese traders in pre-war Angola.

We came across several girls wearing cowries around their necks. Most were in a poor state, and with only the base showing I could not identify them.

We camped at the very scenic Kunene River Lodge near Ruacana that we reached well after dark. At Swartbooi Spruit there is a little monument for the Dorsland Trekkers.

We took the 4x4 road from Ruacana to Epupa Falls. Some people had time for personal growth, for it is not a road for the faint hearted. Two of the ladies cried for about 3 hours non-stop....I think it was really brave of them to come along and to try to overcome their fear. It took us a whole day to cover the 59 km of mountainous roads, and it was my turn to drove!! I loved it.... Occasionally the 'road' went back to the Kunene and during lunch I did a bit of pebble jumping in

[1] Ohumba - singular

[2] Ozombongoro - plural

[3] Ondikwa - singular

the Kunene river. I found only two dead bivalves, *Caelatura kunenensis* (Mousson, 1887), but was called back after a member of the party received a big fright from either a hippo or a crocodile. He couldn't see what it was, he only saw a terrible big splash and something huge moving just under the surface!

We stayed for 2 days at the Epupa Falls, one of the most scenic places I've ever been to. I didn't find any shells, but then, I didn't have the time to search, as I had to do the washing... By now all our clothes were dirty, and it was our last water point for a few days to come. Our space was very limited, each person in the group took the minimum sets of clothing, as we all agreed that food and water were more important.

From Epupa we headed to the well-known Van Zyl's Pass. The pass can only be traversed in one direction... down. The up-way is too steep for safe travelling and is not allowed. After the gruelling Van Zyl's Pass we camped in the Marienfluss at the Otjinungwa campsite on the Kunene River bank. Here I found the broken valve of a freshwater oyster, *Etheria elliptica* (Lamarck, 1807) and some live *Melanoides victoriae* (Dohrn, 1865).

We came across women wearing the *ozonhumba* a few times. I took two cones and a handful of *Cypraea annulus* with me, just in case someone was willing to swop... They were very interested in the shells. They can speak only their own language and we 'talked' to each other about the shells, each in her own language. However, while they understood exactly what I wanted, they were not willing to part with it, not for shells, money or food. Ashamed of myself I realized how wrong and selfish I was. I wonder what would my reaction be if she asked my wedding ring? A definite no-no, of course. Her *ohumba* is evidentally one of her most valuable possessions and I admire her for her inner strength not to let her culture go. A salute to you, Himba-woman, keeper of your culture!

Damaraland

We left the Marienfluss with the famous fairy circles for the Hartman's Flats and Damaraland. At Purros we were very privileged to see the desert elephants and twice along the road we saw giraffe. We 'bush-camped' in the dry Gommadommi riverbed. While pitching her tent, one of the ladies found the most beautiful little shell, and in the last light of the day I was on my knees again. By now everybody in the group were on the lookout for shells!! I found a few more of this *Sculptaria* sp. and also one more species.

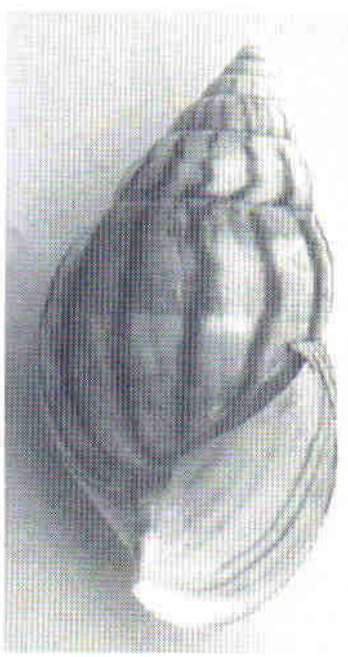
It was unfortunately time to start our way back, and we headed eastwards to camp at the crystal clear springs at Ondongwa near Sesfontein. Here we experienced the 'East-wind' that apparently can blow for days... Believe me, it really blows! One of the vehicles was a bit sandblasted after repairing a flat tyre.

Civilization for a change

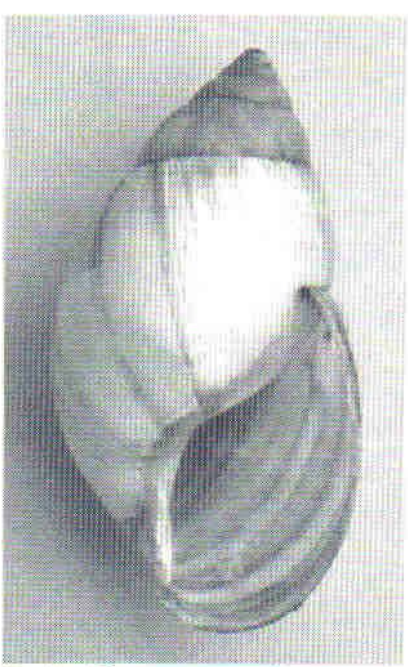
We tried to visit the Skeleton Park, but they wouldn't allow us as day visitors. There I was with only a few kilometres between me and the ocean.... We visited the petrified-forest and Burnt Mountains. Our next stopover was Khorixas where we were on tar road for the first time in days. On our way to the north-east, we had a nice rest at the Tsumeb Municipal Campsite. It was washing time again and my Sputnik washing machine (driven on elbow-power) worked overtime. Fresh meat, fruit and veggies were obtained for the last leg of our holiday.

Bushmanland

In the Bushmanland I found the most shells. We stayed at community campsites under huge baobab trees.



Achatina schinziana Mousson, 1887 from Tsumkwe area, 60 mm.



Achatina tracheia from Halali, Etosha, 55 mm

No water and no ablution facilities! There are a few big 'tourist' baobab trees in the region, one being hollow. I didn't see it though, I was shelling... (*Bulinus scalaris* (Dunker, 1845), *Bulinus tropicus* (Krauss, 1848) and *Pupoides calaharicus* (Boettger, 1886)). Wherever I scratched I found something. I even found a *Pila occidentalis* (Mousson, 1887)! It must have lived in one of the (now dry) pans in a more wet season. On one of the baobab trees are the names carved of a group of Dorsland Trekkers. My ancestors were amongst that specific group and I can just imagine what they must have endured all those months on the 'road'.

We were in the Kaudom Reserve for 2 days and stayed in both the Kaudom and Sigaretti camps. Shells were easy to find, especially *Pupoides calaharicus* (Boettger, 1886), *Xerocerastus damarensis* fm. *maximus* (Connolly, 1930) and juvenile *Achatina schinziana* Mousson, 1887, but animals not. The grass was taller than I am, and the few animals we saw were very wary of the vehicles. There were clearly not enough animals to graze the grass. The absolutely beautiful trees in autumn colours, many, many birds (and for me the shells..) compensated for the lack of wildlife.

Alas, we had to go home again...but we all agreed that the northern parts of Namibia are well worth a next visit, and I hope that it will be soon.

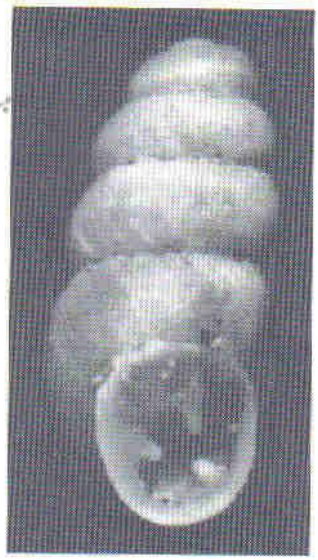
Species found

In total I found 17 species of terrestrial or fresh water shells. To identify them, headache upon headache... Literature on terrestrial and freshwater species is not easily available. I did my best, took pictures and hope that you have enjoyed the journey with me. Any persons with more up-to-date or accurate identifications of the shells shown are very welcome to write to me. Also, do not hesitate to contact me if you are interested in a 4x4 shelling safari - marine or terrestrial!

Kobie du Preez
Tel. 012 6602394 / 082 3726790 or peabrain@global.co.za

Notes on some of the species

Family: Chondrinidae



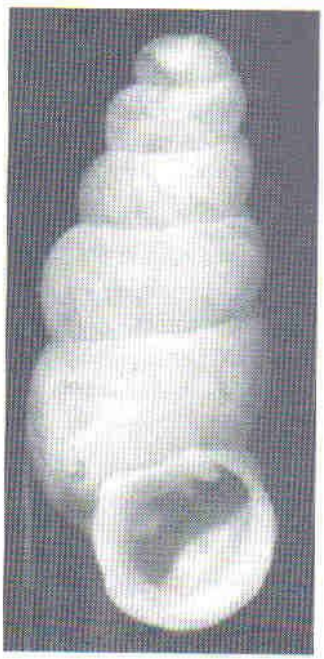
Gastrocopta damarica (Ancey, 1888), Etosha, L=2.0 mm.

Aperture with 5 projections within. Widely distributed from Kaokoland and Ovamboland in Namibia to KwaZulu-Natal and Port Elizabeth area.

Family: Pupillidae

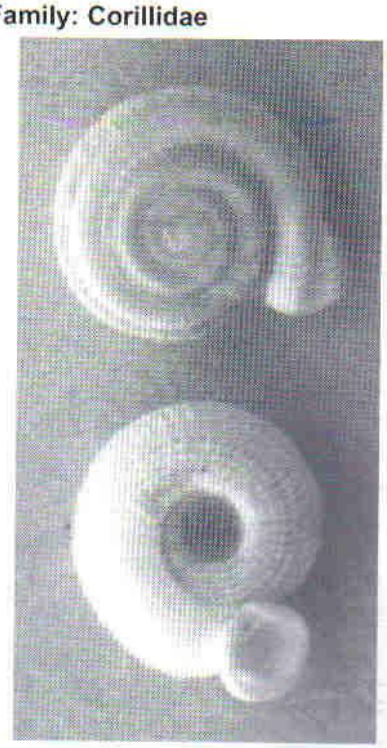
Pupoides calaharicus (Boettger, 1886), Etosha & Tsumkwe area, L=5.1 mm.

Aperture expanded, without any teeth. Parietal region with a minute tubercle. Found mostly in dry regions. Desert-colous snails and occur in enormous numbers. Dead shells may be seen in hundreds in the veld, but the living animals only emerge from aestivation after the rains has come and crawl over the bushes in hundreds.



Microstele noltei (Boettger, 1886), Etosha, Halali, L=3.3 mm.

Family: Corillidae

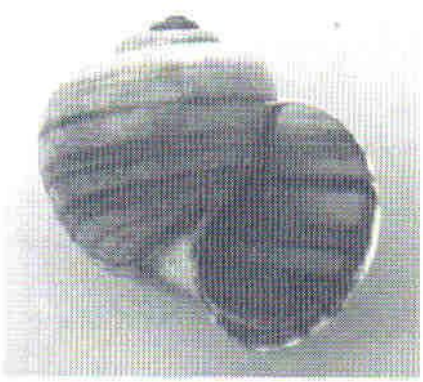


Sculptaria cf. pretiosa Zilch, 1952, from Gommadommi, diameter = 6.9 mm

Small discoid shells with very fine cancellate sculpture. Aperture enlarged with 3 to 4 folds or denticles inside. The best place for collection of shells is in the dry season among the piles of driftwood and debris brought down by the rivers when in flood.

Family: Ampullariidae

Apple snails are freshwater snails, but are able to breathe either water or air, and can thus be called amphibious. The animals are oviparous, laying large eggs is masses. Although the animal is always dextral, the shell may be either dextral or sinistral. Animals herbivorous. [See *Strandloper* 251, September 1997, for more information on this family.]



Pila occidentalis (Mousson, 1887) (Peters, 1845), L=42 mm.

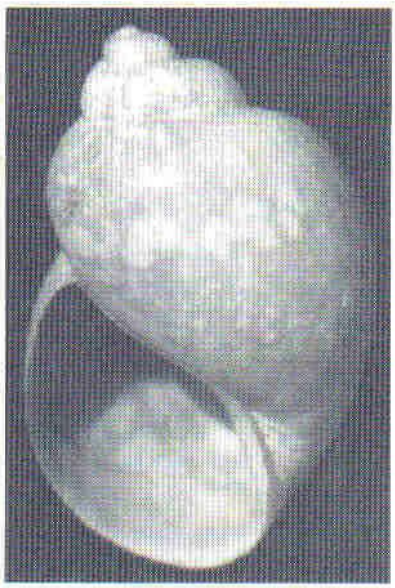
Shell dextral, globular. Four to five convex whorls. Spire short. Large aperture with a horny operculum. Colour pattern of brown spiral bands, alternating with bands of paler shades. Occurs in Kunene and Okavango river systems.

Family: Planorbidae

The animals from this family have red blood and act as host to one of the larval stages of the parasite causing bilharzia in humans.

Bulinus tropicus (Krauss, 1848)

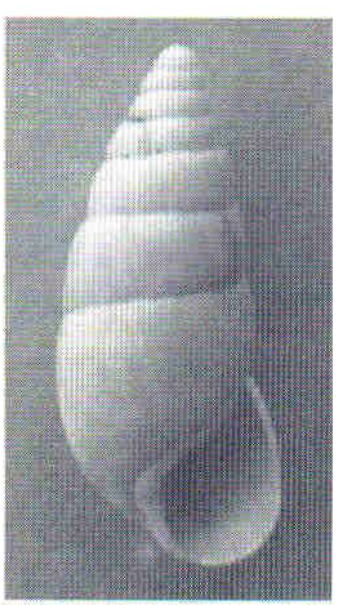
Sinistral shell, ovoid conical. Common throughout Southern Africa.



Bulinus tropicus (Krauss, 1848), Tsumkwe area, L=6.9 mm.

Family: Subulinidae

Deserticolous snails and occur in enormous numbers. Dead shells may be seen in hundreds in the veld of Namaqualand, Damaraland and Botswana, but the living animals only emerge from aestivation after the rains has come and crawl over the bushes in hundreds. When aestivating these snails close the aperture with a thick white epiphragm like the Achatinidae.



Xerocerastus damarensis fm. *maximus* (Connolly, 1930)

Shells are very variable in size and appearance. Some may be slimmer, others plumper than the normal. This species is normally about 25 mm long.

Family: Etheriidae

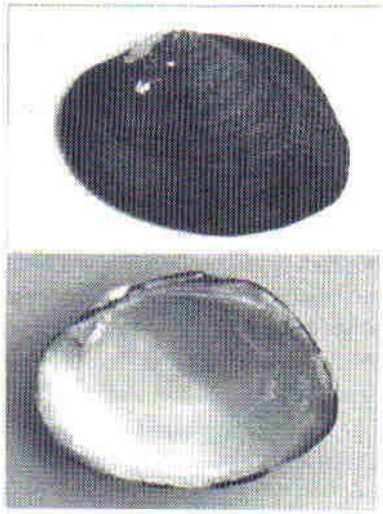
This family are called River Oysters, just because they live attached to rocks, not because they are true oysters.

Etheria elliptica (Lamarck, 1807), Okangwati, Kunene R., 90 x 65 mm.

Hinge toothless, ligament sunken. Internal surface nacreous, but dull and blistered.

Family: Unionidae

Valves rather thick and solid. Inner surface nacreous. Hinge well developed. Viviparous. After hatching the baby mussels (called glochidia) are ejected by the mother. They attach themselves to fishes and burrow under the scales. After a while they drop off and burrow in the mud where they grow to maturity. continued overleaf



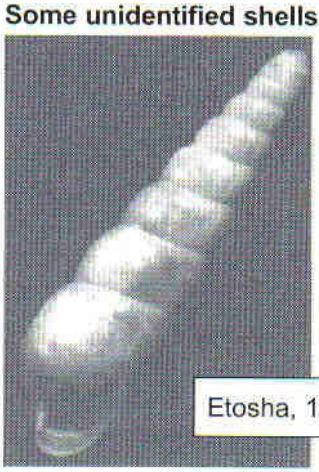
Caelatura kunenensis (Mousson, 1997) Kunene River., near Ruacana, 29 x 22 mm

Was *Unio kunenensis*. Lives in the Kunene and Zambezi rivers. More equiaxed than *Unio caffer*.

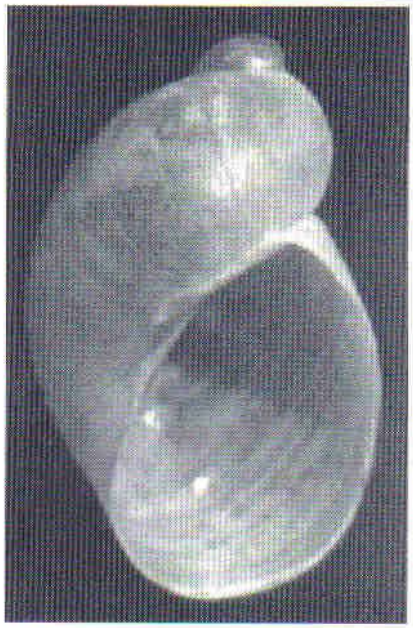
Family: Thiaridae
Fresh water snails. Operculum thin.

Melanoides victoriae (Dohrn, 1865), juvenile from Okangwati, Kunene, L=14 mm.

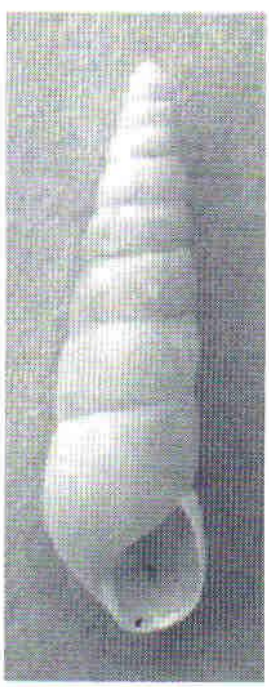
Some unidentified shells



Etosha, 10 mm



Lymnaea sp. (freshwater) or *Succinea* sp. (damp vegetation), from Kaudom, L=5.0 mm.



Purros, L=20 mm

Exchange wanted

Mr Manuel J. Tenorio of Spain would like to trade Atlantic, Mediterranean and worldwide shells in exchange for *Cypraea*, cones, volutes, cymatiums, *Strombus* and pectens. Contact him at
C/Cartuja 8, 7° G, 11401 Jerez, Cadiz, SPAIN, or on email at
manuel.tenorio@uca.es

CONCHOLI - The Shell Collector's Assistant

Reviewed by Mike Cortie

This nifty computer program for the Windows operating system has everything in it that a collector might need for computerising their shell collection. It is the product of a husband-and-wife collaboration. Hubbie Roelf is a professional programmer and Kobie is the collector.

The cartoon-like icons and pop-up help make the program easy to use. Family, author, locality and certain other relatively standard fields are selected from a drop down list. As you need to, you can add new families, localities etc. The species name itself is free text, as are whatever notes you may wish to add. The authors of this attractive-looking program have thoughtfully made provision for swop lists, pricing, varying numbering systems, your collection of shell books, your collection of shell photographs or slides, authors, collectors, even a want list.

In common with this kind of data base program you must first populate the drop down lists with the necessary family name *etc* before you can add an individual shell. When the drop down lists become longer than can fit on a screen, navigation is aided by typing the first letter of whatever you are looking for.

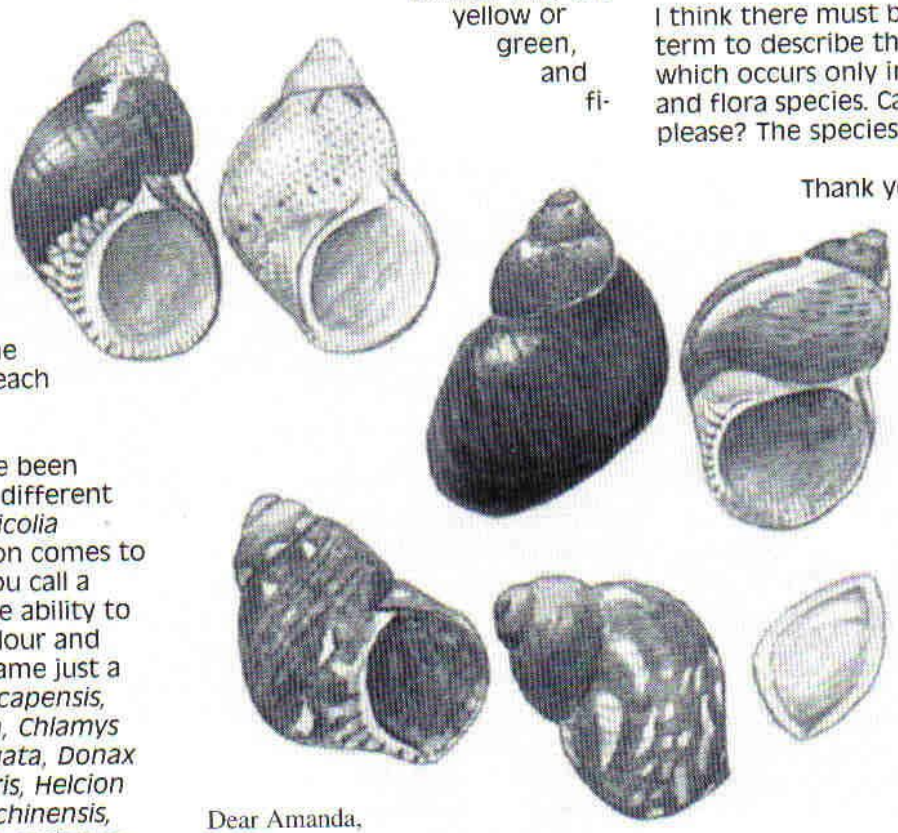
Labels and lists may be printed in a wide variety of formats and with varying content.However, there is no way to import preexisting electronic data so users of less sophisticated or more generic systems who wish to convert are in for a retyping exercise.

The program lists for US$ 99 or R 200. Contact Kobie du Preez at 012-660-2394 (H), write to her at PO Box 51694, Wierda Park 0149, or email her at **peabrain@global.co.za.** Kobie has also said that she might consider shells in lieu of payment.

Letters

Dear Dr Kilburn,

My name is Amanda van Niekerk and I'm a member of the Port Elizabeth Conchological Society. I have been collecting shells for the past 31 years. Its a proud feeling to collect for so many years and to know the different species of each beach in my area.



For many years I have been fascinated by all the different colour patterns in *Tricolia capensis*. The question comes to mind, what would you call a species which has the ability to grow in different colour and pattern forms? To name just a few species: *Tricolia capensis, Calliostoma ornatum, Chlamys tincta, Diloma variegata, Donax sordidus, Turbo cidaris, Helcion dunkeri, Calyptraea chinensis, Conus tinianus, Thais castanea, Dendrofissurella scutellum, Venurupis corrugata, Fissurella mutabilis, Sunetta contempta, Gibbula benzi, Gibbula tryoni*

Then there are the other 'mindbenders' such as *Nerita albicilla*, *Cellana capensis* and *Nucella dubia*, which have a neutral colour, but extensive variation in patterns. To name a few examples from birds and plants: look at the colour variation in budgies (light-blue, yellow, green) but they are all the same species, or the flowers of pansies ('gesiggies') or petunias which come in a great variety of colours and pattern forms.

If there is one species I can't resist lying on the beach, it is *Tricolia capensis*. They are like diamonds to me. I've got thousands of them in my stock. I have made a separate collection through the years of all the different colours and pattern forms. From Cape Town come greyish-black ones, those from Port Elizabeth are reddish, the Fish River area yields reddish to yellow-green ones, which also seem to be the largest in South Africa. Further along at East London they are yellow or green, and finally, by the time you get to Durban they are small, thin, and delicately patterned. One thing is for certain : it is possible to collect 100 to 200 shells of each and every colour and pattern form. Some are abundant, some are rare.

I think there must be a scientific term to describe this feature which occurs only in certain fauna and flora species. Can you help me please? The species is.....

Thank you for your time and knowledge,

Amanda van Niekerk

Dear Amanda,

Many thanks for your letter.

Regarding colour variation there are a lot of factors. Beach colour **may** be a lot brighter and redder/pinker than on a live shell - for example, live *Tricolia capensis* is usually brownish- red instead of bright red. Obviously beach-wear does something to the shell layers. Habitat can affect colour: *Natica texta* living on mud is darker and less yellow than those living on sand. Geographic variation can also occur: as you know *Tricolia capensis* is black on the Atlantic coast. Possibly this is a true subspecies.

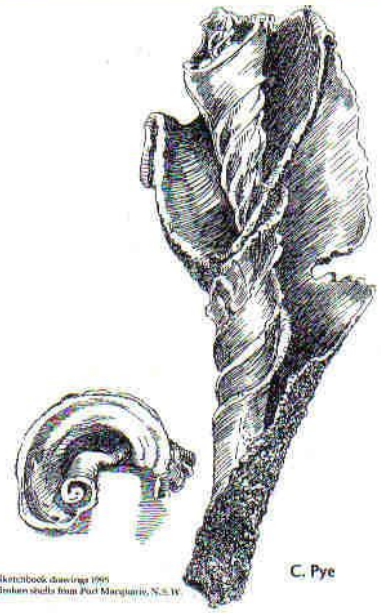
The main cause is genetic, leading to a phenomenon called polymorphism (if colour only it is sometimes called "polychromatism"). There has been an attempt to explain this in terms of survival value: predators will concentrate on locating and eating the commonest colour form, only changing if they finish most of the population of that form. Personally I have never been able to understand the logic of this theory! I think it is more crucial to remember that shell colours are only excretory pigments, mostly derived from the animal's food, which are disposed of by building them into the shell material. Snails and most predators are colour blind, so it does not matter too much if a shell is brown, red or green.

So the word you want is **polymorphic.**

Best wishes

Dick Kilburn

Illustration: *Sea Shells of Southern Africa*, Kilburn & Rippey



Sketchbook drawings 1995
Broken shells from Port Macquarie, N.S.W.

C. Pye

Flotsam

Report on the 4th Great Shell Show

compiled from notes provided by R.M. Tietz

The fourth of the Border Shell Club's Great Shell Shows was held between Friday 13th August and Sunday 15th August. The show was manned by the Club's members in two shifts. Forty nine entries were received, and for the first time this included seven contributions from the Pretoria Group of the Society, six of whom made a special trip down to East London for the event. However, this year only six entries were received in the Junior Section.

The judges were Mary Bursey of the East London Museum, Dr Dick Kilburn of the Natal Museum and Christina Reeve. The Judges are to be commended for setting a high standard and for the many comments written for the individual entries.

An overall impression for collections in the club is that some are deteriorating as a result of exposure to the atmosphere and to light, especially the damaging ultraviolet rays. Also, not enough emphasis is placed on locality and ecological information. Members like to use small labels and concentrate on identification information. Labels should be larger to include exact locality data, habit and habitat notes.

At the prize-giving ceremony on Friday afternoon, founder-member Marge Courtenay-Latimer handed out the prizes.

The prize winners in the Junior section were Dillon Bursey, Lorren Smith, and Grant, Jessica and Kala Pollock.

In the Open division the prize winners were Mike Wigley, Johel van den Berg, Ivan Hartwell, Megan Manthe, "D-J" Hodgkinson, Brenda Roberts, Ann Pollock, Nicky Steytler, and Kobie du Preez.

Members have been greatly stimulated and have benefited from the Show's programme. Dr Kilburn gave a public lecture on "Lives of Molluscs", which included stunning slides and startling disclosures about the inhabitants of some of our shells.

Special thanks are due to all members who helped with the planning and preparations, did duty, made tea, took photographs, sold raffle tickets, provided a plate of snacks and who entered their shells in more than one class.

Junie 1999 — Prof Douw Steyn het skyfies gewys van skulpe van Sodwana-baai. Dit was alles strandskulpe, almal in pragtige toestand en met helder kleure.

Douw sê die geheim van sulke skulpe versamel, is om vroeg in die oggend langs die kus te stap. 'n Mens moet stap, en nie ry nie want al ry jy stadig, sien 'n mens op hierdie manier nie die mooiste goed raak nie.

Julie 1999 — Jelle Lammers het laaie met pragtig gemonteerde kauri's en keëls gewys. Ewegroot skulpe is simmetries gerangskik, op verhewe blokkies en met netjies byskrywing - voorwaar 'n kykersplesier.

Joh Groenewald het strandskulpe van die Namibiese kus vir identifisering gebring. Die land se kuslyn is sowat 1600 km lank en minder as 'n kwart daarvan is vir die publiek toeganklik.

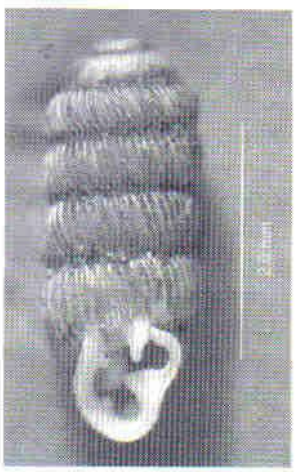
Die skulpe was van 9 lokaliteite wat met GPS-verwysings aangedui was: in hoofsaak van die Meobbaai-omgewing aan die verbode kus sowat halfpad tussen Walvisbaai en Luderitz, en van Möwebaai en verder noord aan die Skedelkus. Altesaam 24 species is geïdentifiseer, waaronder 7 klipmossels (*Patella* sp).

A WALK THROUGH THE VELD AT HENNOPS RIVER, GAUTENG

by Mike Cortie

For some years I had been thinking about investigating the snailing possibilities of Hennops River, a mountainous region of Gauteng west of Centurion. Fellow land-snailers 'Doc' van Hoepen and Don Aiken (both now deceased) had visited the area in the 70s and had found interesting material but somehow I had never got around to going there myself. So, after some phoning around, we uncovered a privately owned picnic spot and walking trail, and early one Saturday morning we set off.

The hiking trial was 6 km long so we did not hang around the picnic site and set off for the river crossing at once. We reached the river and its hand-operated cable car in a few minutes. As we speculated on how best to operate the contraption and how to get our two year old over, we were approached by an official-looking lady, clad in khaki and bearing a clip board and walkie-talkie radio. It apeared that the final scenes of a rather intimate love scene were being filmed on the other side of the river by a French movie company and we were asked



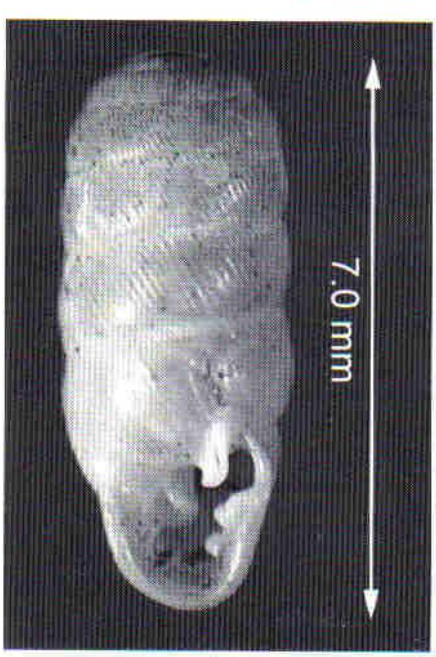
Gulella connollyi (Melville & Ponsonby, 1909)

to wait ten minutes, or at least until the climax in the plot had passed. The mood of the our party became quite jolly as we speculated wildly on the nature of the story line!

Fellow member Ken Brown and I had a quick scrabble in the meantime through the leaf litter of the river bank and immediately found several long twirly shells of a subulinid which I believe to be *Opeas lineare*. Suitably enheartened by this good omen, and having been given the go ahead to cross the river, we set off on the hike. Up the hill and past the film set it went, though indigenous bush and grassland. Buck, bird life, and even wilderbees there were a-plenty, but a vast amount of scratching was unable to turn up more snail shells. So the hike itself became rather more of a sight seeing tour, while the boys munched on the snacks brought along.

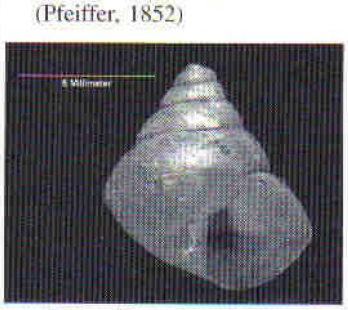
It was in fact only after we had completed the loop and returned to the vicinity of our starting point that the serious snailing began. While the others engaged in merely eating lunch, Ken and I had a wonderful time sifting through the sand and leaf litter along the river bank. The twirly little subulinids abounded, and higher up in the food chain, were at least two species of streptaxid, tiny gem-like live *Gulella connollyi*, and several rather more battered specimens of *Gulella pretoriana*.

Also present were numerous empty shells of the improbably named *Edouardia mcbeaniana*, dozens of tiny brown *Trachycystis ordinaria* with exquisite, sculptured shells and a few little conical fellows which Dr Dai Herbert of the Natal Museum tentatively identified as *Kaliella barrakporensis*, family Helicarionidae. Some of the shells found are illustrated here.

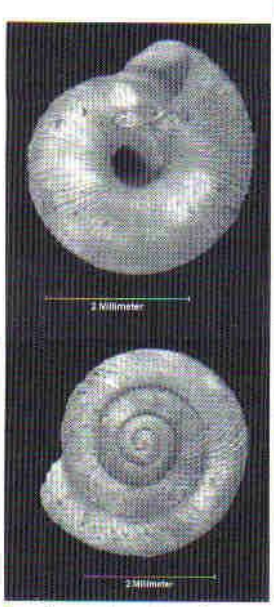


Gulella pretoriana Connolly, 1932

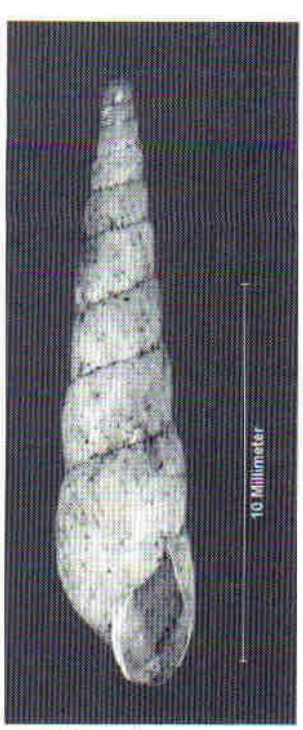
cf. Kaliella barrakporensis (Pfeiffer, 1852)



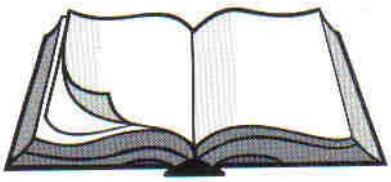
Edouardia mcbeaniana (Burnup, 1905)



Trachycystis ordinaria Melville & Ponsonby, 1908



cf. Opeas lineare (Krauss, 1848)



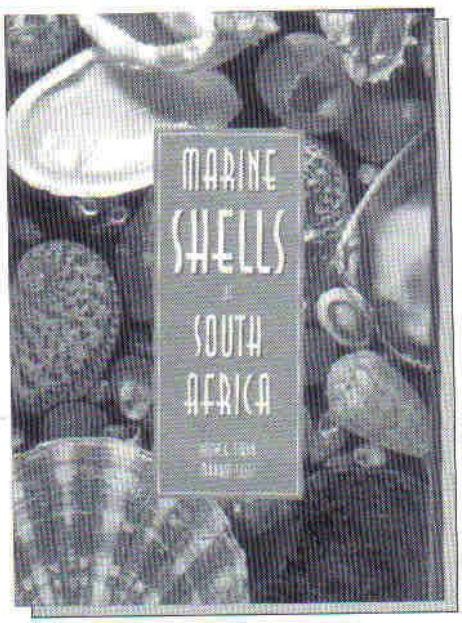
Book review

MARINE SHELLS OF SOUTH AFRICA

by D. G. Steyn & M. Lussi

Published by Ekogilde, P 0 Box 178 Hartbeespoort, 0216. Hard cover, A4 format, 264 pages

Reviewed by David Freeman



This guide to the intertidal molluscs of Southern Africa covers more species than have ever been illustrated in one volume before, and more than fills a gap that has existed in the available literature on South African shells since the last handbooks for collectors went out of print a number of years ago.

Any adverse comments which follow, do not in any way detract from the book's undoubted advantages which should place it on the "must have" list of anyone interested in the shells of Southern Africa.

The design of the cover and dust jacket is colourful, although the designer's decision to reverse the same picture for the back cover was a whimsical notion which doesn't quite succeed as it results in unnaturally sinistral shells.

There is a brief introduction, a most useful glossary of conchological terms and annotated drawings showing shell morphology. The main text consists of the briefest possible descriptions of shells illustrated on the facing pages. This makes it easy to identify the specimens shown, without paging back and forth. Each description is accompanied by a small map showing the range of that particular species along the coast between Oranjemund in the west and Kosi Bay in the east.

The plates are in full colour throughout, and are on the whole excellent, with specimens photographed against a black background. It was slightly irritating that some specimens are carelessly out of alignment, while some of the solitary specimens are shown with apertures down. The aperture is too important as a diagnostic feature to be ignored in most cases.

This book will be especially useful for identifying those confusingly similar shells such as the turrids. For the first time, a large range of these, and of other equally puzzling lookalikes such as the Siphonarias, are here illustrated side by side to facilitate comparisons.

The good coverage of bivalves is most welcome.

While the abbreviated text has ensured that the descriptions are placed directly opposite the relevant illustrations, this has left no room for explanations of a number of problems facing the reader. A couple of "new" and unfamiliar genus names make an unexpected appearance without any comment. The absence of synonyms adds to the confusion.

Ongoing work by taxonomists continues to destabilise genus names, so it is perhaps not surprising that the authors have used some new genus names and ignored others, but one would have appreciated some explanation for their selectivity. SUB-GENUS NAMES are also not used, but this is not necessarily a disadvantage. The book's value would have been greatly enhanced if some of these matters had been covered in a separate paragraph of taxonomic notes, or had been included in the index of scientific names at the end of the book.

In dealing with taxa containing subspecies, TRINOMINAL NAMES should be used even for the nominate subspecies, e.g. *Conus algoensis algoensis* and similar examples should be named in full.

GENUS NAME CHANGES which were used in this book, and which might be worth noting, are the following:

Specimens 74 and 78 are listed as *Diloma* instead of *Oxystele*. This follows Vaught (1989) whose monumental catalogue of the mollusca repositions *Oxystele* as a subgenus of *Diloma*.

Specimens 427 - 429 are listed as *Cominella*. This is also one of Vaught's revisions. She repositioned our familiar name *Afrocominella* as a subgenus of *Cominella*.

Specimens 335 - 338 are listed as *Vaughtia*. These used to be provisionally lodged in the genera *Tritonalia* or *Ocenebra*. This is a very welcome

Strandloper

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Dr M.B.Cortie,
P.O.Box 1664,
Ferndale, 2160
South Africa

or e-mail me at **achatina@iafrica.com**, or **mikec@mintek.co.za**

reclassification by Houart (1997?) of this group of small species which have languished in the taxonomic wilderness for many years.

Four species whose genus names were NOT changed in this book are the following, which were listed as *Phalium*. According to Kreipl, in his work The Recent Cassidae (1997) specimens 253a & b; 255; and 258 would now be reclassified as *Semicassis labiata zeylanica* (Lamarck, 1822), *Semicassis labiata zeylanica* forma *iredalei* Bayer, 1935, *Semicassis bisulcata* (Schubert & Wagner, 1829) and *Casmaria decipiens* Kilburn, 1980

It is not clear why *Casmaria decipiens* cannot also be included as *Semicassis*, but we are more or less obliged to follow Kreipl.

A number of variable species are depicted and are referred to in the text as 'forms' in a manner that suggests that these names are part of the 'official' scientific names of the shells. For taxa subsequent to 1960, use of this term is a contravention of the rules of nomenclature of the ICZN and so should be avoided. It might have been better to have avoided this legalistic pitfall by referring to the relevant non-valid 'forms' as "variety named...". In some places the authors have blurred the distinction between 'forms' and validly proposed subspecies. One understands that the authors were deliberately adopting a rather informal approach to amateur shell collecting as opposed to formal conchology, but a book of this calibre immediately raises expectations of scientific accuracy, and one can't get away with ignoring the formalities.

Specimens referred to as 'forms', but requiring modification, are the following:-

43b *Patella concolor* forma *polygramma* Tomlin, 1931. (valid, pre-1960, but originally cited as "variety".)

52b *Gibbula multicolor* forma *hera* Turton, 1932. (Published as *Gibbula multicolor* forma *biporcata* A. Adams, 1850.)

112 *Turritella carinifera* forma *kowieensis* Sowerby, 1900. (Should be *kowiensis*.)

174b *Natica simplex* forma *saldontiana* (Bartsch, 1915). (Published as a subspecies: *Natica* (*Tectonatica*) *simplex saldontiana* Kilburn, 1976.)

208b *Cypraea algoensis* forma *batsatensis* Bodoni, 1985. (Not valid - merely a local colour variety.)

209b *Cypraea edentula* forma *nahoonensis* Lorenz, 1989. (This was validly proposed by Lorenz as a subspecies:*Cypraeovula edentula nahoonensis* Lorenz, 1989.)

220b *Cypraea chinensis* forma *tortirostris* Sowerby, 1906. (The specimens illustrated are too worn to be distinguished from distorted *Cypraea annulus*. This problem is aggravated by not showing the apertures of the specimens.)

222b *Cypraea fimbriata* forma *durbanensis* Schilder & Schilder, 1938 (This was proposed as a subspecies, not a "forma": *Cypraea fimbriata durbanensis* (Schilder & Schilder, 1938).)

228 *Cypraea staphylaea* forma *laevigata* Dautzenberg, 1932. (Originally proposed as a separate species: *Cypraea laevigata* Dautzenberg, 1932, and subsequently proposed as a subspecies: *Cypraea staphylaea nolani* Lorenz, 1989)

229 *Cypraea limacina* forma *clarissa* Lorenz, 1989. (This was also validly proposed as a subspecies. See also 209b, above.)

230b *Cypraea helvola* forma *meridionalis* Schilder & Schilder, 1938 (Proposed as a subspecies.)

236 *Cypraea arabica immanis* Sch & Sch, 1939, is not a form, but a valid subspecies.

272: *Cabestana cutacea africana*, (A Adams, 1854) Along with the problematic variant *dolarium*, and an unnamed intermediate variety combining features of both, this is another species which was previously known as two separate species:-*Cymatium africanum* and *Cymatium dolarium*. The status of this shell is perhaps best retained as a South African subspecies of the Mediterranean *Cabestana cutacea*, with the author (A Adams, 1854) as set out above. The illustration of this species on page 75 is an example of a minor shortcoming of the book in the sense that the illustrations are arbitrarily out of scale. The photo gives the impression that both shells are about the same size, and more or less equal to the other small cymatiids on the page. In fact the *dolarium* shell is probably only about 35mm long, compared with its 80 mm neighbour.

287b *Argobuccinum pustulosum proditor* (Frauenfeld, 1865) is a valid subspecies, not a form, of *Argobuccinum pustulosum*. The subspecies is indeed found on the sub-Antarctic islands such as Gough, Marion and Tristan da Cunha. However, the intertidal variety, if one can call it such, which occurs on the Atlantic coast of the Southwestern Cape, is not the same as *proditor*, nor is it sufficiently different from the A. *pustulosum* occurring east of Cape Point to warrant separate recognition, or a separate name. The intertidal Atlantic shells tend to have eroded spires which might distort their shapes somewhat. Specimens which wash ashore in rough weather from the subtidal zone tend to be more globose, but the difference is probably influenced by environmental factors.

312b *Heliacus implexus* forma *alfredensis* Turton, 1932. (Originally proposed as a separate species *Solarium alfredensis* Turton, 1932 but later synonymised.)

332 *Favartia maculata* forma *salmonea* (Melvill & Standen, 1899) (Was proposed as a separate species, *Favartia salmonea*, Melville & Standen, 1899.)

493a *Nassarius kochianus* forma *crawfordi* Sowerby, 1892. (Originally proposed as separate species, *Nassa crawfordi* Von Martens, 1843.)

550c *Marginella piperata* forma *lutea* Sowerby, 1889. (This is now recognised as a full species, separate from *Marginella piperata*; i.e. *Marginella lutea* Sowerby, 1889.)

681b *Conus sponsalis* forma *parvatus* Walls, 1979. (*Conus parvatus* is considered by some authorities to be a valid species, and not merely a variety of *C. sponsalis.)*

A few of the range and distribution maps could perhaps be extended as follows:
176 to Knysna
253a to Table Bay
264a to Gonubie
290 to Knysna (dead shell)
625 to Table Bay
868 to Knysna (fresh dead with periostracum)
966 to False Bay
1000 to Table Bay (Milnerton)

ERRATA: Apart from the comments above in connection with specimens referred to as forms, the following appear to need correction:

Page 18
Diloma species are too small to be harvested for food, nor are they known as 'alikreukel'. In fact, this applies to *Turbo sarmaticus* and, to a lesser extent, to *T. cidaris* (species 83 & 84).

Pages 60/61
Specimens Nos. 214 are not *Cypraea alfredensis,* which is invariably grey, even when dead and beach rolled. The sharp dentition on the columella of the right hand specimen suggests that it might be a *Cypraea cohenae* , which does vary considerably. *Cf.* specimen 211 on pp 58/59.

Pages 64/65
The size, 80mm, and locality, suggests that specimen 236 is the Natal subspecies *Cypraea arabica immanis* Schilder & Sch. 1936

Pages 78/79
290: *Linatella caudata / cingulata ???* Needs clarification.

291: is *Linatella (Gelagna) pallida* Parth, 1996. (Note spelling of author's surname) This is a new species, easily confused with *Linatella succincta* Linne, 1771. The name *clandestina* under the photo is an error.

294: If the Genus is *Gyrinium*, i.e. neuter gender, the species should be *cuspidataeforme,* also neuter gender.

Pages 136/137
Specimen 550c is *Marginella lutea* (separate species)

Pages 158/159
Specimen 649 is not very typical of *Conus algoensis algoensis*

Specimen 650 is *Conus algoensis simplex* Sowerby, 1858 while Specimen 651 is *Conus algoensis scitulus* Reeve, 1849. (The two specimens were transposed on the plate)

Specimen 653 is *Conus leopardus* Röding, 1798.

Pages 162/163
Specimen 675 - Right-hand specimen is possibly not *Conus mozambicus lautus* but more probably a colour variety of *Conus mozambicus mozambicus.*

Pages 164/165
Specimens 684 - The shape of the spire suggests that the right hand specimen is possibly *Conus mozambicus mozambicus.*

This book is not readily available from the general run of urban bookstores, but copies cost around R200 and can be ordered directly from **Professor Steyn** at

3 Hannington Wood, Button Street, Lynnwood Glen, Pretoria 0081.

Phone **012-361-2308.**

Foreign readers should call or write first to establish the dollar price.

Conchological Society of Southern Africa

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Correspondence to:
7 Jan Booysen Str., Annlin,
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