The Strandloper
BULLETIN OF THE CONCHOLOGICAL SOCIETY OF SOUTHERN AFRICA

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The *Achatinidae* of South Africa

original text by the late D. Aiken
revised & illustrated by M.B. Cortie

A family of medium to very large shells, acuminate ovate in shape and often decorated with coloured vertical streaks or flames, straight or zigzag. Aperture simple, with or without truncation at the base of the columella. They are sculptured with axial striae or spiral grooves, or both. About 200 species of Achatinidae occur in Africa, with about 40 species, in various genera, occurring in South Africa. The genera or subgenera include *Achatina, Metachatina, Archachatina, Tholachatina, Lissachatina* and *Cochlitoma*. However, in preparation for this article it became apparent that the taxonomy of this family has not yet been finalised. Therefore, rather than mislead readers with regard to the appropriate genera, most of the species will be referred here to the genus *Achatina*. The shells of some of the species intergrade in morphology and coloration, and reference must sometimes be made to anatomical characteristics to verify the identity. Unfortunately, colour and colour patterns are of limited taxonomic significance in this family. Nevertheless, only conchological differences will be considered in this article.

An occasional specimen of these shells may be found by keeping a careful eye open during walks in indigenous forests or bush. However the animals are generally nocturnal, and prefer to crawl about only during or after rain.

Achatina varicosa from coastal forest near East London. The foot of the animal is greenish-grey. The upper surface of the body has three dark brown longitudinal stripes with the region between stripes being pale yellow. The shell itself has a striking yellow and brown striped pattern. This individual was found crawling up the trunk of a tree. A more typical habitat is in and on the deep piles of loose leaves and twigs that carpet the forest floor.

Acknowledgements

Don Aiken spent many years preparing a monograph on South African non-marine molluscs. Tragically, he passed away before the task could be finalised. However, his son, Roy, has kindly allowed me to make use of his manuscript. Some of it was published more or less verbatim in *Strandloper* 243 as **The genus *Gulella* in South Africa**. The present article is based on Don's chapter on Achatinidae. I have updated the original text somewhat but have not attempted any revision of the taxonomy. The species recognized, which were based largely on the work of Connolly and later, of A.C. van Bruggen, are simply reported "as is". Illustrations have been added where feasible of material from the D. Aiken collection, the H.E. van Hoepen collection, the literature, the East London Museum, Ken Brown's collection, Guido Poppe's web site, and my own collection. I wish to thank the Aiken family, Dr A.C. van Bruggen (Nationaal Natuurhistorisch Museum in Leiden, The Netherlands), Dr A.R. Mead (University of Arizona), Mary Bursey (East London Museum), Dr R.N. Kilburn (Natal Museum), Prof. R. van Zyl, and messrs Neville Bauer and Ivan Hartnell for advice, assistance and/or shells. However, responsibility for the errors that remain is all mine! Readers who have comments, corrections or relevant reprints are encouraged to communicate them to the Editor.

Mike Cortie

Metachatina kraussi
(Pfeiffer, 1846).

Generally large, solid shells and, as in the genus *Burtoa*, the base of mature specimens merges smoothly into the columella without truncation. This is unusual in the Achatinidae with truncation being the rule. (Juvenile *Metachatina* do show some truncation.) Adult shells are creamy-white with the umbilicus closed by a callus formed by the reflexion of the columellar margin. There are seven to nine whorls with fine reticulate sculpture on all but the lower half of the body whorl. Juvenile shells show quite different colouration to the adults. Small shells with up to six whorls are umbilicate, have a sharp outer lip and show red-brown streaks, blotches and flames on a pale buff background. On the last whorl the red-brown decoration ceases abruptly at the periphery. On adult shells the lip is thickened and coloured dark brown around the whole aperture.

Size: The size is variable; Van Bruggen (1969) gives a length range of 96 to 159 mm, and maximum diameters ranging from 50 to 71 mm. However smaller shells were reported by H.E. Van Hoepen, who found a colony of animals at Mapelane (just south of the St. Lucia mouth) the shells of which were about 80 mm long by 45 mm in diameter. Distribution: Widespread along the coast line of Kwazulu-Natal as far south as Kelso and northwards into Mozambique.

***Achatina craveni* group**
Achatina craveni Smith, 1881.

A fairly large shell with a narrowly rounded apex and eight whorls. Buff to yellow in background colour with variable deep red-brown flames. Occasionally is unicoloured. Sculpture strong and reticulate on the early whorls, becoming weaker on the last two. From the periphery of the last whorl to the base, the spiral sculpture disappears while the radial striae remain. Columella truncate. According to Crowley and Pain (1964) as cited in Van Bruggen (1966, 1969), it is not possible on conchological grounds alone to reliably differentiate this species from *Achatina tavaresiana* Morelet. However, both Mead and Van Bruggen consider it a distinct species. It is also easily confused with

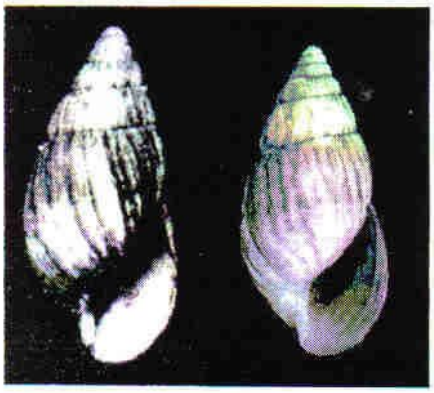
Achatina zuluensis. However, according to Van Bruggen (1977) true *A. craveni* has not been found in northern Kwazulu-Natal. Size: 60 to 80 mm by 30 to 50 mm. Distribution : Central and East Africa down to the Northern Province.

Also somewhat similar to *A. craveni* in conchological appearance are :

Achatina bisculpta Smith, 1878.
A medium-sized shell with seven or seven and a half whorls when adult. The colour is pale greenish yellow with chestnut flames. Apex narrowly rounded, first two whorls smooth, remainder sculptured above the periphery, with distinctive radial striae crossed by spiral striae giving a granulate appearance. Below the periphery the sculpture becomes finer and with more numerous spiral striolae. Aperture truncate. Size : 47 to 56 mm by 27 to 28 mm. Distribution: Northern province and Mpumalanga extending to Pretoria.

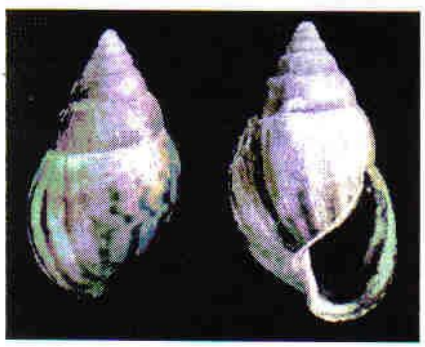
Achatina penestes Melvill and Ponsonby, 1893.
Although retained as a species by Van Bruggen (1965), Connolly himself remarks that the species is very similar

to *A. bisculpta* and *A. craveni*. The colour pattern is not as much flammate as streaky. The sculpture is similar in all respects to *A. craveni*. Mr Aiken's opinion was that it is merely a smaller version of the latter. Size : 40 mm by 18 mm. Distribution : near Pretoria.



(left-illustration from Connolly, 1939, right-specimen collected at Hennops River)

Achatina smithi Craven, 1881.

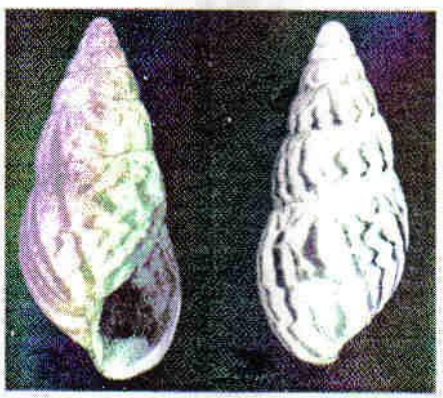


This shell is a little plumper than the previous species but is, in all other respects similar. Size : 54 to 60 mm by 29 to 34 mm. Distribution: old Transvaal, Eastern Cape and north to Zimbabwe and Botswana.

Achatina zuluensis Connolly, 1939.
A weaker sculpture and a slightly larger size than *A. craveni*, however, the genital anatomy is significantly different to that of *A. craveni* (Van Bruggen & Appleton, 1977). The background colour is straw-yellow, and the ratio length-of-shell to diameter-of-shell (*l/d*) varies from 1.7 to 2.1. Size: 70 to 75 mm by 30 to 40 mm. Distribution: coastal areas of northern Kwazulu-Natal to southern Mozambique.

(illustration from Connolly, 1939)

A. sanctaeluciae Van Bruggen 1989.



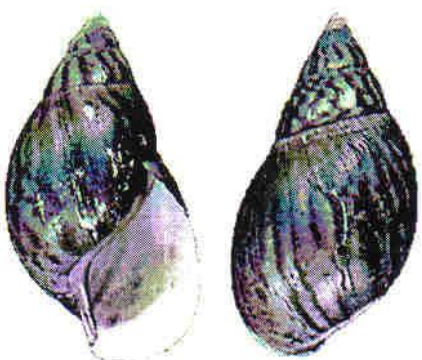
(illustration from Van Bruggen 1989)

Very similar to *A. zuluensis*, this species has a pale base with rather distant flames which vary from straight to zig-zag. It is quite a slim shell with an *l/d* of 2.2 to 2.4. Size : 60 to 70 mm by 28 to 32 mm. Distribution : near St. Lucia, Kwazulu-Natal.

Attractive giants

Achatina immaculata Lamarck, 1822 synonym -*Achatina panthera* Ferussac, 1821 .
This species has a large, solid shell and is whitish with brown flames. However, the flames are so closely spaced in the case of typical *immaculata* that the shell seems uniformly brown. It always has a pink columella. Some authors preferred to consider *A. panthera* and *A. immaculata* as separate, however Van Bruggen (1966) found that the two taxa intergraded in the Mpumalanga lowveld. The shape varies from obese (*l/d* of 1.8 to 1.9) for the typical *immaculata* form, to slender (with *l/d* of 2.0 to 2.1) for the *panthera* form.

(typical *immaculata* from Messina)

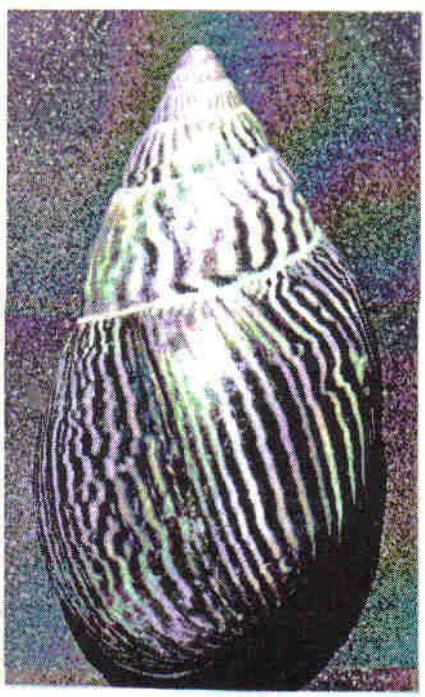


(typical *panthera*, illustration from Guido Poppe website, specimens figured from Mauritius).

Size : 150 to 200 mm in length. Distribution: Central Africa, Zimbabwe, Northern Province, Mpumalanga, northern Kwazulu-Natal, and Mozambique.

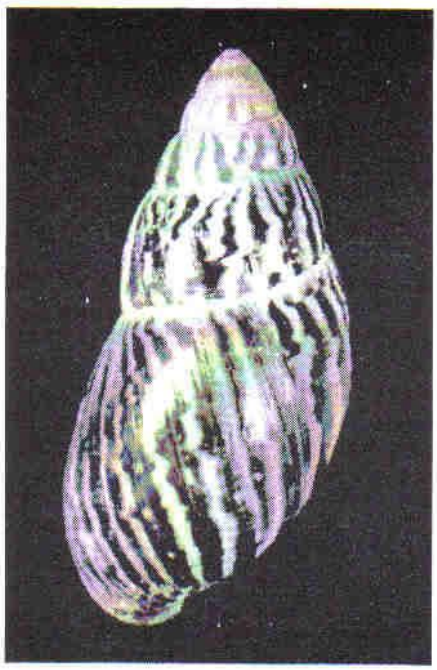
The *zebra* group

Achatina zebra (Bruguiere, 1792)
Synonym *A. linterae* Sowerby, 1889.



A large shell with overall outline more convex than *Achatina varicosa* but a plumper overall outline. Pale buff ground colour and vertical dark brown stripes. Sculpture and aperture as in *A. varicosa* and often confused with it. There are seven or eight whorls. The size and colour pattern would normally separate adult specimens of these two species; juveniles are confusingly similar. This is the most common species in the Eastern Cape. Size : 100 to 140 mm by 60 to 70 mm. Distribution: damper parts of new Eastern Cape province including Outeniqua Mts and Plettenberg Bay, and through to Fort Hare, Dwesa and Xora mouth.

Achatina varicosa Pfeiffer, 1861.



(shell from collection of the East London Museum)

A large shell with more convex whorls than *A. zebra*, but nevertheless, slimmer profile overall. In addition, the periostracum seems thinner and less adherent than in *A. zebra*. The light buff ground colour is streaked with almost black flames. Connolly (1939) noted that a unicoloured yellow shells have also been found, particularly in the East London area. There are some six or seven whorls with a smooth apex, remainder sculptured above the periphery with fine reticulate sculpture becoming weaker on the last whorl and disappearing on the base. The contour varies considerably and the *l/d* can vary from 1.7 to 1.8. Aperture simple, columella white. Size : 60 to 90 mm by 35 to 50 mm. Distribution: coastline of the new Eastern Province.

The *granulata* group

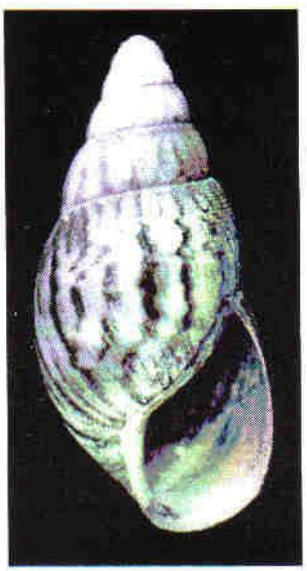
This group of similar shells includes *Achatina granulata*, *A. pentheri*, *A. semidecussata* and *A. semigranosa*, all granulate, and in some cases possibly synonyms of *A. granulata*.

Achatina granulata Pfeiffer, 1852.

A predominantly granulate species, large and with eight whorls. The apex is broad and radial and spiral sculpture are equally strong on the upper whorls but weaken slightly on the body whorl and become progressively weaker towards the base. The ground colour is buff with red-brown streaks and flames all over the shell. Size: 115 to 125 mm by 55 to 60 mm. Distribu-

tion: Kwazulu-Natal south of the Tugela to Pondoland. Common in the Natal Midlands.

Achatina semidecussata Pfeiffer, 1846



This species shows similarities to *A. granulata* but is smaller and more slender. There are eight whorls with fine granulation above the periphery and showing only vertical striae below. The background colour is yellow with red-brown streaks and zig-zag flames. Size: 73 to 83 mm by 30 to 36 mm. Distribution: southern coastline of Kwazulu-Natal.

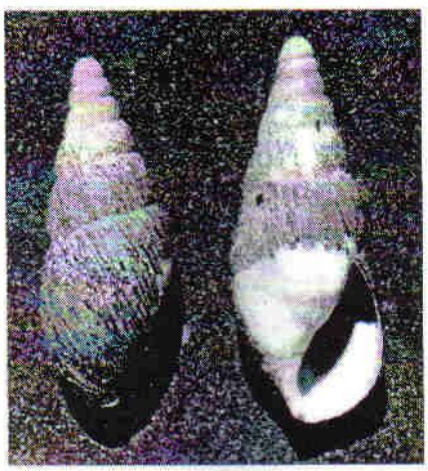
Achatina semigranosa Pfeiffer, 1861

(shells from the East London Museum)

This shell has particularly strong granulation on all of the seven or eight whorls except for the last half of the body whorl where the sculpture gives a shiny appearance contrasting markedly with the rest of the shell which is rough to the touch. The base colour is yellow-buff with sparse red-brown streaks and blotches. Size: 77 to 81 mm by 34 to 36 mm. Distribution: Kwazulu-Natal coast.

The *vestita* group

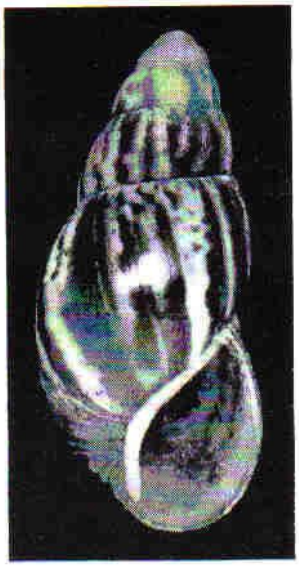
Achatina vestita Pfeiffer, 1855



Quite the most distinctive member of the genus because of its furry periostracum which follows the growth striae. The underlying coloration is said to be bright and flammate. However this will normally not be evident due to the presence of the periostracum or, often, due to bleaching and weathering. Only the first few of the whorls show granulation. The apex is more acute than expected for this genus. However, the shell is easily distinguished from any other species in the family when it is in a fresh condition. Size: 70 to 77 mm by 32 to 35 mm. Distribution: along coast from Port St. Johns to Mozambique.

Achatina ustulata Lamarck, 1822

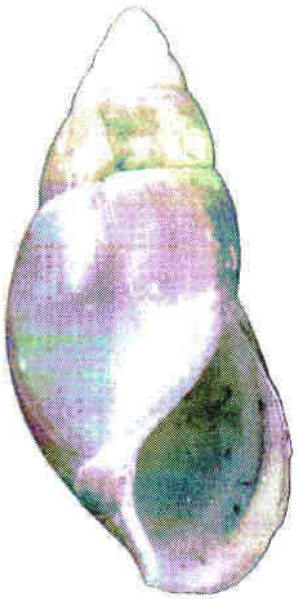
An elongate shell with a broad apex. There are six to eight whorls that are only slightly convex and have faint granulation above the periphery of the early whorls and practically absent on the last two whorls where only growth lines are visible . The suture is crenulate. The buff background colour is overshadowed by broad, irregular red-brown flames and blotches. This species seems allied to *A. vestita* (Van Bruggen 1967). Size: normally 54 to 60 mm by 22 to 27 mm, occasionally 88 mm by 34 mm. Distribution: indigenous forest along the southern Cape



coastline (Mossel Bay to Humansdorp).

A. ustulata limitanea Van Bruggen 1984

According to Mead (cited in Van Bruggen 1984) this is a sub-species of the previous shell. However, it is significantly larger, ranging to 100 to 120 mm by 40 to 45 mm. It occurs together with *A. vestita* in the coastal forests of the Transkei, between at least Umzimhlava and Dwesa. The appearance of fresh shells is a glossy yellowish-brown, however the shell beneath the periostracum is a pale, glossy cream. Surface sculpture as for *A. ustulata*. As there seems to be no records yet of *A. ustulata* between



Transkei and the southern Cape, it may well be that further investigation will establish this mollusc as a distinct species.

Mountain snails
Achatina machachensis Smith, 1902

(shell from collection of East London Museum)

Some resemblance to *A. ustulata*, particularly with regard to the genitals, but that species is much larger and has a *l/d* ratio of 2.0 to 2.6, whereas the ratio for the present species ranges from about 1.7 to 1.9 (Van Bruggen 1985) so that the contour is quite different. There are six whorls and the sculpture is granulate on all but the last and lower half of the penultimate whorl where growth striae only are present. Ground colour buff with narrow reddish brown streaks. Size: 42 to 57 mm by 23 to 31 mm. Distribution: highland slopes of Eastern Cape, Lesotho and the eastern Free State.

Achatina churchilliana Melvill and Ponsonby, 1895

(from Connolly, 1939)

One of the unicoloured yellowish shells in the genus. It is medium-sized with seven or eight whorls and a blunt apex. The sculpture is granulate and the radial and spiral striae are equally strong and regular but become weaker below the periphery of the body whorl. Size : 60 to 70 mm by 30 to 35 mm. Distribution: Kwazulu-Natal (Durban, Amanzimtoti).

Achatina cinnamomea Melvill and Ponsonby, 1894

A very glossy, obese shell with six whorls showing hardly any spiral sculpture on the early whorls and none on the body whorl. Buff to brown in colour with occasional darker lines following the growth striations. Mr Aiken reported that the shells in his collection are dark brown on the upper half of the body whorl and somewhat paler below in quite distinct zones. This colour pattern is also

found on the next species. Size : 45 to 55 mm by 32 to 34 mm. Distribution: southern regions of the Transvaal (Standerton, Grootvlei), Free State (Kopjes).

Achatina dimidiata Smith, 1878
A shell showing some similarities to the last species but larger and comparatively narrower. Also glossy and, typically, with a dark brown band from the periphery to the suture. The spiral sculpture is more prominent and continues onto the base but becoming fainter and eventually disappearing. Not to be confused with *Limicolaria dimidiata* Martens 1880, a species that occurs north of the equator (see Parkinson *et al* 1987) Size : 70 to 80 mm by 40 to 44 mm. Distribution : montane forests in Mpumalanga (Lydenburg, Piet Retief, Pilgrim's Rest), Kwazulu-Natal (Majuba, Vryheid, Dundee).

(illustration from Van Bruggen 1972)

Specimen of *dimidiata* from Machadadorp

Achatina montistempli Van Bruggen, 1965

A uniformingly reddish-brown coloured species with a slender contour, bearing some similarity to *A. dimidiata*. There are eight, slightly convex, whorls with granulate sculpture on all but the lower part of the penultimate whorl and the lower part of the body whorl where only growth striae are seen. Size: 65 to 83 mm by 27 to 34 mm. Distribution: Kwazulu-Natal (Cathedral Peak).

Achatina omissa Van Bruggen, 1965

(illustration from Van Bruggen 1965)

The shell of this species is uniform yellowish-green in colour. It is slender and somewhat smaller than the *A. montistempli* with eight slightly convex whorls. The sculpture consists of granulation on all whorls except for the base below the periphery where only coarse growth striae continue. The vertical sculpture is wavy giving the surface a wrinkled appearance and a distinctive feature is the crenulation at the sutures. There are also anatomical differences between this and *A. montistempli*. Size: 59 to 68 mm by 25 to 26 mm. Distribution: Kwazulu-Natal (Cathedral Peak).

Achatina burnupi Smith, 1890
A mountain-dwelling species with distinct colouration. Connolly (1939) notes that on fresh specimens the first three and a half whorls are a rosy buff and the remaining whorls tawny or olive yellow. The columella is white. As far as can be ascertained the sculpture consists of growth striae only. Van Bruggen (1972) suggested that this species might merely represent a southern form of *A. dimidiata*. Size : 72 by 36 mm. Distribution : montane forests at 1500 m altitude, Kwazulu-Natal (Giant's Castle).

Achatina parthenia Melvill and Ponsonby, 1903
The shell is briefly described (Connolly, 1939) as a small, glossy, yellow shell with seven and a half very convex whorls. The granulate sculpture is weak on the earlier whorls and almost absent from the last. It is recorded as tree dweller. Size: 37 by 18 mm. Distribution: northern Kwazulu-Natal.

Achatina simplex Smith, 1878
Synonyms- *A. crawfordi* Morelet, 189 and *A. oedigyra* Melvill and Ponsonby, 1984.
Another unicoloured greenish-yellow shell with occasional growth lines. A fairly small shell with seven whorls, sculptured, above the periphery on the early whorls with fine granulation, the vertical striae crossed by wider spaced spiral striae. The gloss is enhanced on the last whorl by the almost total absence of spiral sculpture and the smoothly rounded growth striae. Size: 50 to 58 mm by 28 to 30 mm. Distribution: Kwazulu-Natal (Ladysmith to Durban, north to Mfongosi), and, surprisingly, Mossel Bay in the Western Cape.

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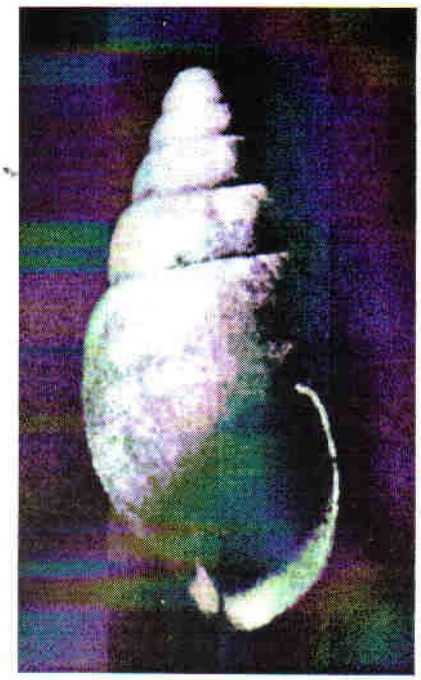
Achatina transvaalensis Smith, 1878
Synonym- *Achatina subcylindrica* Preston, 1909.



(from Connolly, 1939)

A fairly small, unicoloured pale buff shell, somewhat more cylindrical than others in the genus. There are seven or eight whorls, sculptured with fine granulation above the periphery. Size: 40 to 50 mm by 15 to 25 mm. Distribution: Mpumalanga, Swaziland, northern Kwazulu-Natal. Also Hennops River in Gauteng.

Others

Achatina drakensbergensis (Melvill and Ponsonby, 1897)

The type was not actually found in the Drakensberg Mts but in the Inhluzani Spurs, near Howick. The shell is fairly large and somewhat smoother than others in the genus. It is buff with short, chestnut coloured stripes from the suture to the periphery. There are eight whorls and the granulate sculpture is weak above the periphery, becoming extremely weak on the base. The apex is bluntly rounded. Size: 81 by 38 mm. Distribution: Kwazulu-Natal (Howick, Durban).

Achatina livingstoni Melvill and Ponsonby, 1897

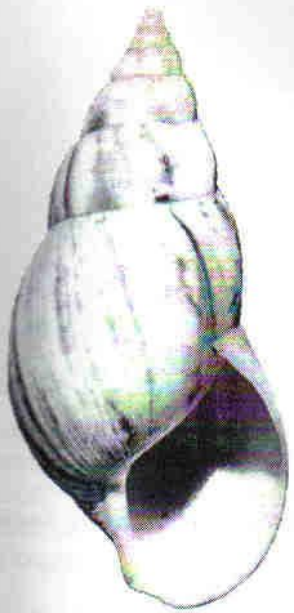
A small, fairly narrow shell with seven whorls exhibiting fine granulation on all but the penultimate and last whorl which shows only growth striae. Colour pale buff with vertical red-brown flames. Size: 42 by 18 mm. Distribution: Northern Cape (Kuruman, Postmasburg, Prieska) and Mpumalanga (Kruger National Park).

Some interesting Achatinidae from elsewhere in Africa

Achatina connollyi Preston, 1912.

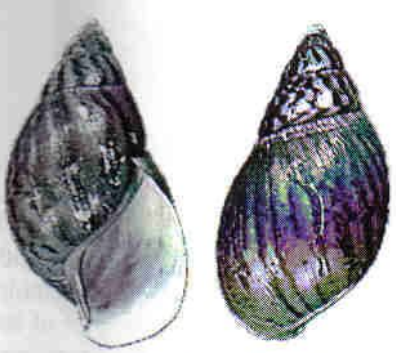
This species bears a resemblance to *Achatina craveni*. Size : 39 mm by 19 mm. Distribution : Zimbabwe (Victoria Falls rain forest) through to Zaire (Van Bruggen 1977). Also from the rain forest at the Falls is *Achatina aenigmatica* Van Bruggen, 1977.

Achatina fulica Bowdich, 1822.



This infamous African land snail has spread through tropical Asia as a esult of accidental and deliberate introductions. It has a voracious appetite. Distinguishable from *A. panthera* by its white columella. Size: up to 125 mm. Distribution: East Africa, Madagascar, Mauritius, Indonesia, Australia, South East Asia, Pacific islands, and beyond! Considered edible by many, it is extensively farmed in tropical Asia and is, for example, exported canned from Taiwan and dried from Malaysia. Dr Kilburn reports that several illegal importations into South Africa have occurred.

Achatina achatina



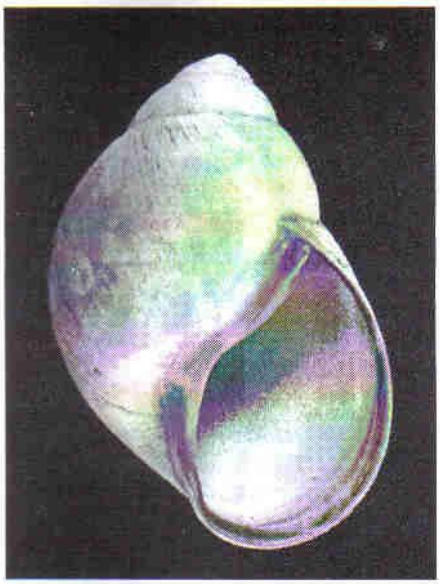
(illustration from the Guido Poppe Website)

Considered a delicacy by West Africans this snail had been collected almost to the point of extinction before a UN-assisted programme started a

snail farming exercise in Benin. Now the farmers produce several thousand market-ready snails weekly.

Achatina reticulata,
The largest land snail known, the shell of which reaches 208 mm in length. Distribution : East Africa, Zanzibar.

Burtoa nilotica Pfeiffer, 1898



Large broad shells with six or seven whorls, uniformly pale reddish-buff with a red to purple edge to the inner lip, columella and paries as in *Achatina immaculata*. There is no flammate colouration. The sculpture is granulate on the upper half of each whorl but the radial sculpture is stronger and wrinkled while the spiral striae are more distant and almost disappear on the base. The aperture is continuous from the base to the columella without truncation. Narrowly umbilicate but the umbilicus is hidden by the reflexed columella margin. Size: 80 to 110 mm by 65 to 71 mm. Distribution: Zimbabwe and countries to the north.

Not from Natal!
Achatina natalensis
According to Barnard (1951) this is a 'smooth and glossy unicoloured yellow shell'. Size: 62 mm. Distribution : St. Lucia. This description is similar to that given here for *Achatina churchilliana*. However, Van Bruggen (1965) reported that the shell originally described as *Achatina natalensis* was probably not from South Africa. Therefore, he says, this name should be removed from the list of possible South African species.

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Strandloper

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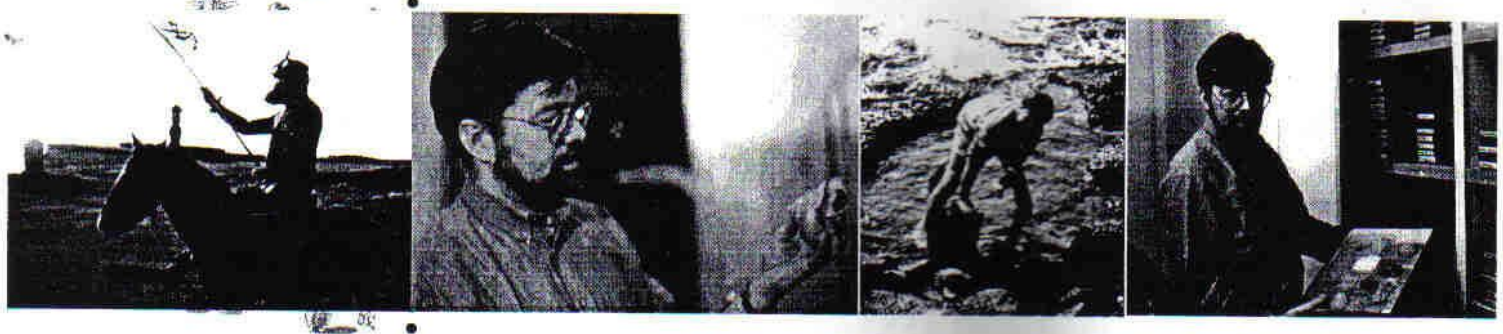

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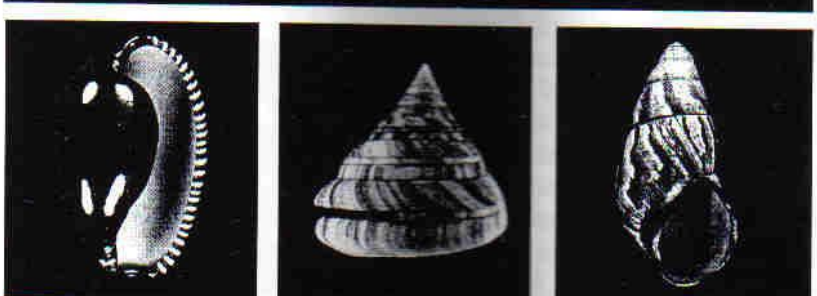

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People-people-people

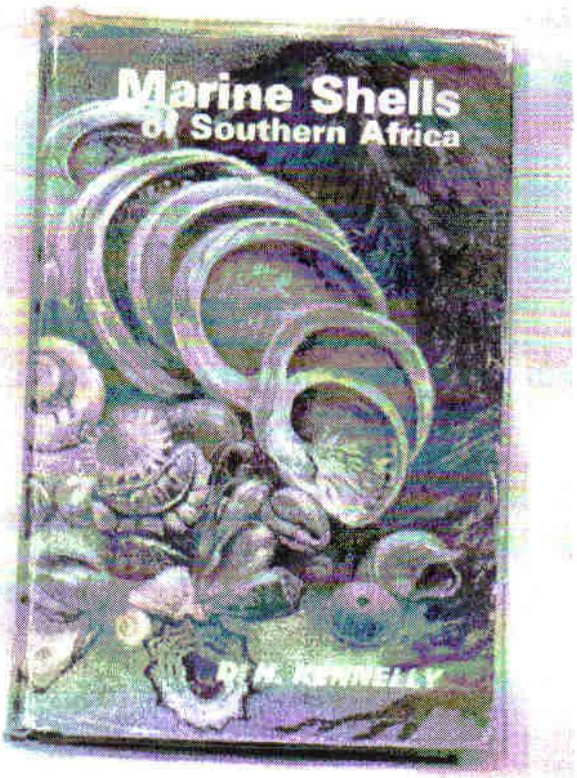
D.H. Kennelly

by Mike Cortie

Many members will recall D.H. Kennelly's *Marine Shells of Southern Africa*. In fact, it was the only book in print on South African shells for several years in the 1970's, and it was the first book I had on South African shells. To prepare for this article I took down my copy from its shelf and flipped through the pages. Twenty-something intervening years had not diminished the excitement and enjoyment that I personally had experienced with the aid of this book. I found my pulse speeding up as I paged past the strombs, *Natica*'s and Cassidae. It even seemed to have a familiar smell! I remembered poring over the photographs and descriptions with my brother and friend on rainy days at our family's cottage at Shelly Beach on Natal's South Coast.

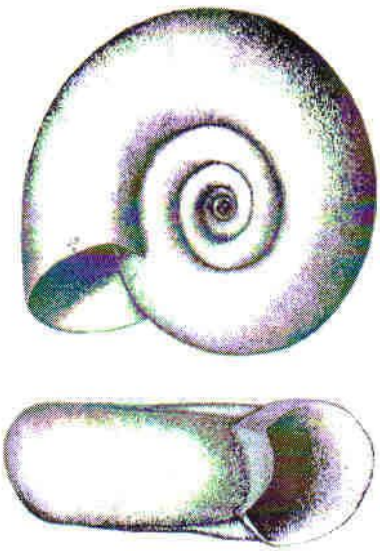
Of course it was not the most comprehensive of books, not nearly as good as Barnard's *A Beginner's Guide*.., and not up to the Kilburn and Rippey of many years later. But it was my personal introduction to conchology. And I would still recommend it as a useful source of information on South African, especially Eastern Cape, molluscs.

Mr Kennelly did more than just write a book however. He also played an active role in the affairs of our Society and of the East London Museum. He was instrumental in the formation of the Border Group of the Society and went on to be President of the Society from 1964 to 1971. He was also a prolific contributor of articles to the early issues of the *Strandloper*. A true Eastern Caper, he was born in Grahamstown in 1890, and grew up in a pioneering environment of farms, ox wagons, little towns, wild places and empty beaches. His life spanned the last of the Eastern Cape 'border' conflicts through to landing a man on the moon. What might he thought of conditions today ? By all accounts he was a methodical man who made a great effort to stay up-to-date with taxonomic changes. He would probably have been vexed, to say the least, by the current rapid state of change in mollusc names. However, the shells and beaches that he loved are still here, waiting to be discovered and enjoyed by all of us.



Acknowledgements
Daily Despatch, 20th October 1967,
Strandloper no.127, March 1971.

Book Reviews



Australian shells

Patty Jansen of Australia has produced *Seashells of Central New South Wales* which covers 484 species to be found in and around Sydney. The books extends to micro-molluscs and is illustrated with line drawings by the author. Reviews of the book on the CONCH-L discussion group on the Internet were very complimentary. A single copy would be A$52 if airmailed to South Africa, however discounts are available for quantities. Send orders to

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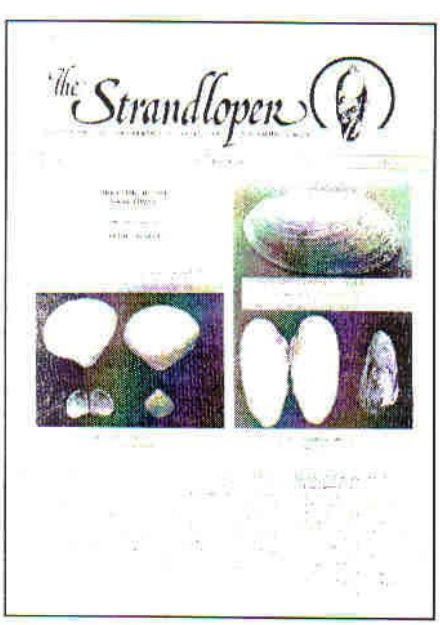

Freshwater molluscs of Southern Africa

Professor Chris Appleton of the University of Natal has produced a marvellous 64 page book on South Africa's non-marine aquatic molluscs. The book is very well illustrated with a combination of line drawings and colour plates, and includes an additional section on bilharzia. This professionally-produced little book has an identification key, a glossary, index and bibliography. It is available from

The University of Natal Press,
Private Bag X01,
Scottsville 3209,
South Africa

for about R50. You should also be able to order it through a book store. I have heard that copies are also on sale in the bookshop of the Transvaal Museum in Pretoria. Well worth getting!

Freshwater molluscs of the Vaal River

Even if you do not order Chris Appleton's book above, do remember that the freshwater molluscs of the Vaal River have been figured in *Strandlopers* 199, 205, and 208. To order these back issues please send R12 or US$ 15. (cheques payable to the Conchological Soc. of S.A.) to the Editor.

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Founded 1958

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