



SEA BONES #5

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

“ THOSE WHO DWELL AMONG THE BEAUTIES
AND MYSTERIES OF THE EARTH,
ARE NEVER ALONE OR WEARY OF LIFE.”

The Annual General Meeting of our Society was fairly reasonably attended, with sixteen enthusiastic shellers, and apologies from another ten members. We were grateful to see a few new faces to add to our numbers.

Alwyn Marais presented a really interesting overview of methods for identification of some of the more common, but confusing members of the family Epitonidae occurring on our shores. The present committee will continue to run; there being no formal nominations to the contrary. For details of the proceedings, please find the following attached:

- The Presidents report.
- Financial report for the year under consideration
- Minutes of the AGM

Although there were fewer exhibits this year, the work of Jelle Lammers on our theme was as usual, of an extremely high standard. His exhibit won the trophy, which he probably owns by now!

Roy Aiken

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PRESIDENTS REPORT - 2011

A year has passed since the massive fest of the locally hosted World Cup Soccer, and as if to detract slightly from our shelling passion, we find ourselves now caught up in the 2011 Rugby World Cup in New Zealand, as defending champions!

The shelling continues unabated, however, and although it would seem on 'the surface', that there is admittedly a concerning ongoing attrition of numbers in our wonderful hobby, as with many hobbies worldwide, let me assure you that there is a hardy, never-say-die bunch of conchologists that continue collecting with a passion in many varied areas.

There are still beaches here, (as well as areas of moist inland leaf litter!) where with patience, decent specimens can be obtained. The thrill of finding a great specimen, or obtaining a new addition to our collections, studying undescribed material or learning of new species, continues up till now.

Whether by luck or not, Pretoria continues to maintain its status as the most active Group, but there is continued activity in Natal (combined with South coast), as well as East London, and sporadic but possibly increasing activity once again in the Western Cape.

In my previous Report, the significance of accepting computer technology for the potential survival of our hobby was alluded to.

The internet has changed this world forever, with one particularly strong trend being the availability of material in places such as e-bay, and the Italian and to a lesser degree, Hong Kong shell Auctions. It is with great pleasure, therefore, that I can confirm that your society now has an official, active website, www.conchsocietysouthafrica.co.za, where potential members can join, ask questions, offer shells or collections, request literature, ask for identification, or share information of a shelly nature.

In addition to this, with thanks to Christelle Deysel for the initial suggestion, we are now also on Facebook. We will be actively requesting other shell societies to include us as a link on their sites, during the next year. Therefore you are urged to make maximum use of our very new Facebook page as a future forum for a multitude of conchological matters. After exactly one month of activity, it is encouraging to see interaction starting already.

Our official mouthpiece, *The Strandloper*, has evolved to the point where its contents consist of quality local conchological information of a very high standard, including printing in full colour, which means that for the foreseeable future, there will be less regular issues (printing finances also being a factor), but a feast of information in each issue. In this regard, it is not only necessary to express grateful thanks to all those stalwarts who continue to support us with their subscriptions, but also to acknowledge that without your continued subscription, certain valuable conchological information would not see the light of day.

This prompts me to offer thanks to my committee for their continued efforts. Firstly to Alwyn, for his superb use of graphics, as well as in the production of scientifically correct text as editor of *The Strandloper*, in his personal capacity. He wears also the unofficial mantle of the Scientific Officer of our Society by way of his position as editor, to monitor and record new species descriptions, and I appeal to members to keep a sharp eye out for descriptions of any

new species from off our shores. To Rina, for her unwavering support and advice at any given moment. To Christelle, for continued effort in the thankless but necessary area of administration and records, to Maurice, who is valued as leader of the Pretoria Group and organiser of note, and to Etrechia, who has actually completed the admirable task of scanning our entire series of photo friendly *Strandlopers* into E-format. We thank her for this far-reaching task. Thanks must go also to Brian Hayes, who from the USA, is promoting membership of our society at the international shell shows.

We record, with sadness, the sudden loss of the leader of our East London Group, Gerald Kirchoff, quiet minister of religion, and a light in East London conchology. We hope that this group will continue to meet in his memory.

The launch of Volume 1 of the *Identification Guide to the Seashells of South Africa* must be considered a highlight of the last year. The methodology, photography and comprehensive display of species in each represented family makes this book a must for all serious collectors of South African shells. Being involved in this Volume, gave one an insight into the huge task such a tome represents.

'Sea Bones' continues to be an ideal in-between method of less formal communication, and certainly has developed a more quality appearance in its upgraded 'E-format'. The advantages of postal savings, and ability to send pictures as well as text, make this a good communication medium outside of the *Strandloper*.

Roy Aiken -- September 2011.

I recently received this article from Mike Fraser whom, together with his wife Valda, are avid divers and underwater photographers and regularly supply us with spectacular underwater images of shells in their natural environment. Although this article is not shell related, it was so gripping, that I would like to share it with the readers, and trust that they will enjoy it as much as I did - *Alwyn Marais*

A DIFFERENT 9-11 EXPERIENCE

On Sunday morning, 11-09-11, the forecast showed a freshening north-easterly wind, so my son, Moo and I decided we'd take the rebreathers for a quick stroll before we watched the Wales / S.A. game. We were keen to dive a 50m reef off Hibberdene that Moo had recently discovered while fishing. It was an easy 8km run from Pumula against a gentle breeze. My GPS showed slack current and the fish finder revealed plumes of fish over jagged terrain. We kitted up eagerly, checked the rebreathers' electronics and rolled into the welcoming blue. As we slid down through the thermocline at 30m, into crystal cold, shoals of slinger and yellow-backed protea bream rose up to meet us. The reef was a paradise of pastel colours and rocky profiles, carpeted with lush orange gorgonians, sponges,

scattered hard and soft corals. As we drifted silently in the pristine deep, surrounded by shoals of inquisitive fish, three yellow-belly rock-cod spied us from a deep crevice. Male humpback whales serenaded their ladies with moaning, squeaking, booming songs. We passed a ragged tooth shark with a fishing hook in the side of its mouth flanked by a juvenile not much more than a meter long.

All too soon the electronics indicated a 25 minute ascent time and we reluctantly decided to call it a day. We swam slowly up through the thermocline, and stopped at 12m, letting the nitrogen unload. The virgin deep had lulled my senses and I could hear my rebreather occasionally injecting oxygen into the breathing gas against the background



whale song. I had my back to Moo, when all of a sudden I heard him shout. I spun around and saw him gesticulating and pointing below me. My immediate thoughts were that the time had come for another encounter with one of Jaws' sidekicks. Instead my eyes focussed on a massive, dark shape heading directly for me. I saw the tell-tale warty projections and long flukes. As it approached it made a half turn so that a slab of grooved white stomach as wide as a bakkie slid past me within touching distance. We whooped with the thrill of the encounter, watching her head for a breath on the surface, thinking how privileged we were. This was the closest either of us had ever been to a humpback as they are usually shy and we were

resonated with the force of her exhalation when she surfaced. She wanted to show off her power and prowess – let us see how a 20 ton marine mammal can roll and gyrate. I'm sure she was willing us to join the game. Repeatedly she swam straight towards us. As she passed, it looked like she was smiling a thin, crooked smile at our trepidation when her barnacled, 3m long flukes sliced past us. Then she'd roll onto her back and with a few strokes of her massive tail, dive down into the deep only to turn and spiral straight upwards. Once, she came so close I shook hands with her, feeling the rubbery softness of her fluke, guiding it over my head to avoid a painful blow. Moo also stroked her several times as she passed. It seemed she liked the sensation of rubbing her body against the buoy line and Moo unclipped the reel from my rebreather harness in case she got entangled and took me for a dangerous ride.



wishing it could be repeated, even just one more time.

Well, sometimes it seems King Neptune reads your thoughts and obliges, because she turned on the surface and porpoised straight down towards us, passing close, observing us with her beady, black eye. Below us she rolled onto her back and swam up past us towards the surface. For a second time I thought how fortunate we were. Little did we know that this was only the trailer before the documentary began. These inept, rubber-clad mammals with plastic fins and yellow humps on their backs must have been an oddity she hadn't ever encountered. I think she wanted to communicate with us. We could hear her emitting funny little squeaks and the water

harm for us. After all, waltzing with a girl the size of four elephants is fun till she stands on your head.

After 35 minutes, I'd like to think it was her serenading suitors that wooed her away, but maybe she just gave up on us and vanished into the blue. We surfaced and hailed the boat, high on adrenalin and the thrill of this once-in-a-lifetime encounter. How I wish I'd had my trusty Nikon to capture and share the visual beauty of this experience. For America 9-11 has gone, but will never be forgotten. It's the same for us and our whale.

Mike Fraser