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SHELL COLLECTING IN CEYLON

by Phillip W. Clover.

After intensive planning, letter writing, shots (ouch!), visas and passports, my wife, Joyce, and I flew out of Clark Air Base in the Philippine Islands. Our first stop in Saigon, South Vietnam was short and memorable, as a few days after we passed through the "reds" blew up the restaurant where we had lunch! From Saigon we flew on to Bangkok, Thailand and spent a few pleasant hours arranging for our stay on the return trip. Then on to New Delhi, India, which was the end of our free ride, thanks to the U.S. Air Force's "space available system".

Seeing New Delhi was worth the whole trip. We spent a few days here and of course saw the marvelous Taj Mahal, built out of white marble in the year 1645. From New Delhi we flew to Madras in south India and received our final clearance to go to Ceylon, as it is an independent country from India.

My telegrams to Ceylon never arrived in time so no one met us at the Colombo airport. We took a creaky old English taxi to find my host Rodney Jonklaas who, besides being a shell collector, is a well known ichthyologist, writer and the only aqua-lung diver in Ceylon.

Rod was surprised to see us drive up, but after eight years of corresponding we quickly made ourselves at home. He lives outside of Colombo and has a regular zoo in his back garden. Monkeys and parrots are wild in the trees, but he does keep the snakes and crocodiles in cages. His pet python had to go as it ate too many pets and scared his visitors, though he didn't have any sneak thieves at night! Marine tropical fish were everywhere as Rodney exports them by the hundreds to cities all over the world.

Our first outing was across the island to Trincomalee about 150 miles, or an all day trip from Ceylon. Just out of Colombo we stopped at a "chank factory". Here they sort by sizes "chank" shells (*Xanus pyrum*) gathered in the pearl banks of N.W. Ceylon, and ship them to India, where they are polished for religious use. I never saw so many "chanks" and asked Rod why he never sent me more? I found out on closer inspection that the natives all had badly chipped channels and apex caused by the natives tossing them into the boats. Each shell weighs 2-3 lbs. Of the thousands I walked over I saw less than a dozen I would consider a specimen shell and most of these were of small sizes.

On the way across Ceylon we stopped at Anuradhapura, a religious area of 2000 years ago where Buddhism was first introduced to Ceylon. Here we visited the marvelous shrines and works of the past, including a temple of a thousand columns. Late that eve we finally arrived in Trincomalee and went to one of Ceylons many famous rest houses built by the Dutch in the 1700s. They are not the Ritz but at \$4-00 a day for two people, including meals, how can you complain?

Anxious to get shells and fish for Rod's export business, we started diving that very night. As I don't like night diving I stayed in shallow water 3-6 foot deep turning rocks. Rodney likes the dark and often goes down 50 foot or more to catch fish as they don't move about and are easy to catch. I found Conus terebra, Marginella angustata, Harpa amouretta, Cypraea ocellata, C. caurica, C. gracilis, C. carneola and C. hirundo, to name a few, by turning rocks.

Next morning we worked a reef below a famous Ceylon temple that the Dutch destroyed by pushing it into the sea. It made a strange area to dive over with stone columns and figures all over the floor. Rod said they even found a 300 lb. stone sex-symbol a couple of years back, that was quite a rare religious artifacts and it made all the local newspapers. Below the reef, on the sand, I found such shells as Conus monile, C. augur, C. betulinus, C. generalis and a species I haven't as yet identified. My first experience at finding Xanus pyrum showed that they stay buried in the sand-mud, making only a slight hump, and that they do not seem to move during the daytime.

During my 4 days in Trincomalee I also found Murex haustellum and M. virgatus alive for the first time. The best find of all, however, was a fine specimen of Voluta arausiaca - in a small shop! One of the town fishermen had found it in his net and brought it in. This is quite possible as it is a huge, deep bay. According to Rod this was one of the three known specimens in Ceylon. Don't know where Webb got them so easily in the early 1900s, but they are not to be found in Ceylon these days.

From Trincomalee we went back across Ceylon by another route, this time high into the mountains and we saw the plantations where they grow their famous tea. We stopped at the city of Kandy, where "Buddas Tooth" is kept in a special temple. It is brought out once a year for everyone to pass by and see it. Rod did this once and said "it looked more like a tusk" to him and ever since he has called the place "The Temple of the Tusk" which makes the Buddhists very unhappy. Also, in this summer capitol of Ceylon, is one of the worlds finest Botanical Gardens. My wife enjoyed this more than shell collecting, as she loves plants, flowers and trees, of which there were hundreds of types covering many acres.

After several days in Colombo sight-seeing, including a visit to the Zoo with the dancing elephants, we were off to Tangalla in southern Ceylon to look for Conus zonatus, more tropical fish and a recently named Voluta, which was of special interest to me. The trips around Ceylon are so pleasant with old Dutch Rest Houses every few miles on the palm dotted beaches, and with each turn in the road bringing a colourful bird or wild animal into sight.

We stopped at the town of Galle and visited an old Dutch Fort that saw some hard times when the British took over Ceylon around 1850. I was very pleased to find some beach specimens of the rare Conus abbas, and much to my surprise, Conus nimbosus and Murex pinnatus neither of which I had ever received from Ceylon before.

After/

After arriving at Tangalla and seeing the water, I almost changed my mind about diving. We got a 40 foot boat and headed out into the 10 foot surf. Once past this it was like being in a barrel going over a falls, the swells were 15 to 20 foot high even when we dropped anchor in about 60 foot of water - and Rodney said this was good weather? Joyce just hung onto the mast and watched as we litterally fell over board whilst getting our aqua-lung tanks on. Once down in the water it was not so bad, except that the surge would toss you up 10 foot or more with the result that I had to grab quickly for a shell as soon as I saw one. I could well see why Conus zonatus stays a rarity and why Voluta cloveriana had not been discovered before, as this was no place to be shell collecting! A possible new species of Xanus also lives here and I was able to collect one which was different in size, shape and pattern from Xanus pyrum. We did get some Conus augur, C. araneosus, C. zonatus (2 fair specimens) and one Cypraea coloba for our efforts, and Rod collected his rare tropical fish which live in this rough area.

Near Tangalla is a very dangerous reef known as the Great Basses, where the water calms down for only 2 or 3 weeks each year. During one of these calms Rod and some friends discovered an old wreck that has turned up several thousand silver coins of Arabic origin, some of them dated 300 years old, which surely adds to the interest of diving in southern Ceylon and will possibly help in finding more rare shells as divers work this wreck.

I would like to have stayed six months in Ceylon to cover the number of good diving areas, including Colombo Harbour, where we found Murex palmarosa and Cypraea interrupta. However, after a few more days around Colombo we checked in with the Customs House people. They were not very happy to see us as they insisted on checking all our baggage, which was mostly fresh and very smelly sea shells! Rod is always given a lot of trouble by these customs people too whenever he sends any shells or fish, as they expect an itemized invoice two weeks in advance. The result is that he litterally has to collect to fit the invoice. It has proved to be easier with fish as all the orders are paid in advance and run into hundreds of dollars and are all shipped on commercial jet planes. Recently when Ceylons lady Prime Minister went to the Cairo Conference they had a bomb scare and were sure that Rod's boxes of fish were bombs!

So we said goodbye to Ceylon and flew back to Madras in southern India for a couple of days of sightseeing. The shops along the beach sell the famous "chank" shells for religious use and to my supprise other shells as well, such as Voluta lapponica, Melo melo, cones and tiger cowrys, but alas, all carved and polished with lacquer, and not one was a specimen shell.

In Bangkok, Thailand, we also found shells for sale in the temple areas, and I noticed that the temple walls were decorated with hundreds of Cypraea mauritiana. The temple that impressed me most, however, had a recently discovered Budda, 10 foot high and covered with plaster. When it was chipped in moving it was discovered that it was made of 5 1/2 tons of solid gold. That my friends would buy a lot of sea shells.

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Editor's Note. This article was written in October, 1964 and was sent to us by Mr. Clover in response to an appeal for articles.

Sea/

SEA SHELLS AND THEIR MAKERS.

by R.N. Kilburn.

Part 1 - Introduction.

From time immemorial, sea shells have attracted the attention of seaside visitors, whether they have been palaeolithic fishermen and Greek philosophers, or modern scientists and poets. Indeed, among the present readers there can be few who, at some stage, have not stopped to pick up some striking shell, and marvelled at its beauty of colour or form.

But although the shells washed up on our beaches are generally empty and lifeless, it should be realised that all are produced by living creatures, which are technically called molluscs. Thus, any study of seashells is incomplete, if the animals which produce them are not taken into account.

The classification of molluscs is a relatively simple one. Basically, they are divided into six classes, each of which is easily distinguished by shell structure and anatomy.

The largest class contains the Gastropods. This rather overwhelming name simply means "bellyfoot", in reference to the large flat foot on which the animal crawls. In the gastropods the shell is in one piece, and is typically spirally coiled (as, for example in periwinkles and garden snails), but may be flattened and cup-shaped, as in limpets and perlemon. In a few groups the shell is totally lacking.

The second largest class contains the bivalves, which are distinguished by a shell consisting of two flattened halves, called valves. These valves are hinged, and joined together by an elastic ligament. Common examples are mussels, oysters and the so-called white mussel. The foot in this group is compressed, and is typically used for burrowing. This class is called the Pelecypods.

The octopus, squid and cuttlefish, with related groups, are classed as Cephalopods. They all possess a ring of tentacles or arms, bearing suckers. Their nervous system is very well developed, and cephalopods, alone among molluscs, may be said to possess some degree of intelligence. The shell is usually reduced and internal, or wholly absent, the only exception being the Pearly Nautilus. The so-called shell of the Argonaut or paper Nautilus will be discussed in a later article.

The three remaining classes are relatively small, and will play little part in this series of articles.

The Scaphopods or tusk shells resemble tiny elephant's tusks, open at both ends. Most inhabit offshore waters, and are seldom, or never, washed up on the beach.

The chitons or Amphineura have a shell consisting of a series of arched plates or valves, with their ends embedded in a leathery girdle. They possess a long flatfoot, by means of which they cling to rocks, and if detached can curl up to protect the underlying soft parts. This characteristic has led fishermen to name our largest chiton, Dinoplax gigas, the "Armadillo".

Finally there are the Monoplacophora or gastropods, which include only three living species, with numerous fossil representatives. They are true living fossils, and until comparatively recently, when specimens were dredged at great depths off Mexico, gastropods were thought to have died out 350 million years ago. Although superficially resembling limpets, they are anatomically unique, and are considered to have several features in common with

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the earliest ancestors of all molluscs.

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This article was the first in a series which were originally compiled for and broadcast by the English Service of the S.A.B.C., who have given permission for distribution amongst members of the Conchological Society of Southern Africa.

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Change of Address:

Mrs. J. Dawson, 9 Catriona, Sprayview Ave., Humewood, Port Elizabeth.

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Exchange Wanted:

Mr. M.J. Gracchi, 10 Pin Oak Place, Santa Rosa, California 95405, U.S.A. A collector of many years has panamic shells to trade for good specimens of South African shells.

Mrs. E.E. Martz, 2525 Eastwood, Evanston, Illinois 60201, U.S.A. Would like to exchange if any members are interested.

Mr. J. Delia, 60 St. Margaret Street, Cospicua, Malta. Is a beginner and wants to exchange Mediterranean shells in order to build up his collection. Also has coral pieces, stuffed crabs and lobsters, as well as sea horses.

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Around the Groups.

Eastern Cape. The Annual General Meeting of the Group was held on 3rd June at the Port Elizabeth Museum. With apologies from four Mrs. Watters, from the Chair, welcomed those present. She then presented her report for the year saying that the Group was formed on the 7th November, 1970, with a "get together" at her home. It started off with four members, 3 prospective members and apologies from four. Since then the Group had grown to a total of twenty-two members. During the period there had been fourteen meetings and one Field outing. Members had found a number of uncommon shells along the coast and had supplied her with full lists of beach and live-taken shells collected at each locality. Mrs. Watters said that she was sure that these lists will be of great help to the Society at some future date. Families studied and identified during the time under review were: Olividae, Conidae, Haliotidae, Neritidae, Cymatiidae, Triviidae, Marginellidae, Donacidae, Veneridae and Tellinidae.

Election of Office Bearers. Mrs. Lewis proposed that Mrs. Watters and Mrs. Farrel be re-elected as Chairman and Secretary respectively, this was unanimously seconded. Mrs. Watters thanked the members for asking her to stand for another term of office and once again took the Chair. Mrs. Farrell said that owing to heavy commitments she would rather not accept the position of Secretary and would therefore like to nominate Mrs. Carstens. Mrs. Carstens asked for time to consider the nomination. Mrs. Farrell agreed to carry on in the meantime.

Mrs. Watters said that she would like to see a Group library started and mentioned that Mr. Kilburn had promised to let them have copies of his papers. Mrs. Lewis accepted the position of Librarian.

The Annual General Meeting was followed by the ordinary monthly meeting, the main item being a talk by guest speaker Mr. Graham Ross, Marine Biologist at the Port Elizabeth Museum. Mr. Ross

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told members that it was the Museum's intention to put its collection of shells in order, to discard what was not required and to classify and catalogue the collection. He said that this would be a big job and asked for the assistance of the Society to build up a complete reference collection for the Museum, and to contribute to the collection. It was decided that at each meeting we would work on this project under the guidance of Mrs. Watters and Mr. McLachlan. Mr. Ross said that he would be responsible for the cataloging and labelling.

Mrs. Watters said that the Hobbies Fair would be held this year from 5th to 8th July. After discussion, it was decided to exhibit two cases of shells, one South African and one Foreign. One of our Student Members, Fiona Maule, would also exhibit on her own. Mr. McLachlan offered the use of three glass-topped cases. A special meeting to arrange this would be held on 19th June at Mrs. Farrel's home.

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Transvaal. The Annual General Meeting of the Group was held on 19th May, 1972 with nineteen members present.

Scrutiny of nomination papers handed in yielded six candidates for election to a committee of five. After discussion it was decided to enlarge the Committee to six members, it was also agreed by 14 votes to three that the Committee should elect the Chairman from amongst themselves.

The new Committee then retired to elect the Chairman and other office bearers, which were announced later as:-

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| Chairman | Mr. G.A. Hyatt |
| Vice-Chairman | Mr. R. Ruben |
| Secretary | Mrs. M.E. Adam |
| Treasurer | Mr. A.H. Adam |
| Members | Mrs. B. Hooper |
| | Miss M.I.G. Mains |

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Meetings:-

- Cape Town Tuesday, 27th June, 1972, and Tuesday 25th July, 1972 at 8.15 p.m. Lecture Hall, S.A. Museum.
- Port Elizabeth Saturday, 1st July, 1972. Field outing.
Saturday, 12th August, 1972. Port Elizabeth museum at 2 p.m. Family Tomnidæ.
- East London Sunday, 25th June, 1972 and Sunday 30th July, 1972, 3 p.m. Lecture Hall, East London Museum.
- Pietermaritzburg Saturday, 1st July, 1972 and Saturday 5th August, 1972. 2.30 p.m. at the Natal Museum.
- Johannesburg Friday, 23rd June 1972. 8.p.m. Theatre Hall, Shell House. Talk on diving.

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SECRETARY/LIBRARIAN

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