



SHELL-O-GRAM

Official Publication of the
JACKSONVILLE SHELL CLUB, INC.

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January Meeting

The Wednesday, January 26th meeting of the Jacksonville Shell Club will be held at the Southeast Branch Public Library at 7:00 PM.

The month's educational program will be presented by noted artist and club member Leigh Murphy. Leigh will demonstrate her shell painting techniques and display some examples of her work.

The Shell-Of-The-Month will be given by Harry Lee on *Chicoreus cornucervi* (Röding, 1798) (Monodon Murex), a showy species from northwestern Australia that Leigh recently captured in watercolor.

As is customary, refreshments will be served and guests are cordially invited to attend.

February Meeting

The Thursday, February 24th meeting of the Jacksonville Shell Club will be held at the Southeast Branch Public Library at 7:00 PM. Note that this meeting is on a Thursday instead of the usual Wednesday.

The month's educational slide program will be presented by Charlotte Lloyd on her collecting trip to the Marquesas Islands, French Polynesia, this past fall.

The Shell-Of-The-Month will be given by Bill Frank on *Cymatium armatum* (G. B. Sowerby III, 1897) – an extremely rare triton species from the western Pacific.

Plan now to attend and bring a friend or guest!

Bay Scallop Season 1999

By Jim Miller*

Until July of this year, the only *Argopecten irradians concentricus* (Bay Scallop) I had ever seen were a few murky photographs in various shell books and several dismal-looking specimens in a dealer's drawer.

As everyone probably knows, scallops are a delicacy, and scallop season is eagerly anticipated by thousands of consumers of the tasty bivalves. So it was that my wife and I took our 17-foot Boston Whaler to St. Joseph Bay, joining another family over the 4th of July weekend for the official start of scallop season. Being vegetarians, we weren't interested in the meat. I wanted a few shells for my collection, but didn't really expect much from these mollusks. It was the chance to explore St. Joe Bay and possibly discover other shells that interested me at the time.

We arrived at about 9:00 AM at Eagle Harbor within St. Joe State Park, expecting to meet the others in our two-boat party. While waiting, we waded out in the shallows to see what was around. Surprisingly, within several minutes, I began finding some rather small Bay Scallops, but also a few very nice *Melongena corona* (Crown Conch) and even one small *Fasciolaria tulipa* (True Tulip).

Unfortunately, the other family didn't arrive until after 10:30 AM, and by that time the wind had kicked up to about 15 knots - enough to make our ride to Black Island a bumpy one. Once there, we found the area around the island already occupied by a good number of boats and most people appeared to have already found a lot of scallops judging from the size of their collection bags. We got anchored off to the northeast side of the island in about 5 feet of water and dove in with our snorkel gear. (Continued on page 3.)



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The **Shell-O-Gram** is issued bimonthly and mailed to all regular members. Annual membership dues are \$12.50 individual and \$15.00 family. Lifetime membership is available.

Send dues to: **Teresa St. John, Treasurer**
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The club meets each month, excluding December, at the Southeast Branch Public Library, 10599 Deerwood Park Boulevard, Jacksonville Florida. Please address any correspondence to the club's address shown above.

Closing date for article submission is two weeks prior to the first of each month of publication. Articles may be republished provided full credit is given the author and this newsletter and one copy of the complete publication in which the article appears is mailed to Editor at the above address.

A Short Note From Your Editor

As we begin the New Year, our newsletter has a new look courtesy of Jim Miller of Tallahassee who generously designed and produced our new masthead. As computers and software have become increasingly powerful, it would seem that anything is now possible in the realm of design, image editing and production. We also owe Jim a debt of gratitude for writing this month's feature article summarizing his experiences during "Bay Scallop Season 1999."

A Note From Cumberland Island, Georgia

Long-time Cumberland Island resident, biologist, and club corresponding member Carol Ruckdeschel writes that there are "Lots of shells on the Cumberland Island beach lately, but then, this is the time of year."

Carol and her research partner, Dr. Bob Shoope, are the curators of the Cumberland Island Museum located on the north end of the island - some 15 miles north of

the Sea Camp Dock. They also publish the quarterly "Cumberland Island Museum Newsletter" and have a website at <http://www.accessatlanta.com/community/groups/cumberland>.

Hopefully, we can convince Carol and Bob, some time this summer, to take time out of their busy schedule and present a program to the club membership.

President's Message

Standing on the threshold of a new millennium, the Jacksonville Shell Club (JSC) membership is faced with new challenges and opportunities. We have already completed a year which saw our participation in a number of public Educational events, including the Kiwanis Science Fair, the Vilano Beach bridge fair, and a propitious annual shell show (thanks to John Fatu and his helpers) - as well as field trips to the Manatee-Schlitz Quarry (Cenozoic fossils) and Cumberland Island, GA. Members helped make the biennial Shellers' Jamboree in Largo, FL and (annual) Conchologists of America Convention in Louisville, KY unqualified successes. We prospered under excellent leadership from President Charlotte Lloyd and the continued prodigious contributions to the widely-acclaimed JSC website by its creator and steward, Bill Frank, not to mention the equally-respected Shell-O-Gram (S-O-G).

What about 2000, fiscal or otherwise? I suggest we ALL put in an effort to advance the club's mission. I, for one, vow that this will be the year of publication of "Marine shells of northeast Florida" - a book which will chronicle the nearly 800 species of marine mollusks we (yes we, the JSC membership) have found in the Jacksonville area. How about other members chipping in? Who can do a program or even a five-minute Shell-Of-The-Month at a regular meeting? Who can volunteer time for one of our educational outreach programs, solicit a new member, produce refreshments for a meeting, make an exhibit for the shell show, write an article for the S-O-G and/or website? Contact me or any other officer whose name appears in this issue. I can assure you there are ample rewards for all comers. Let's make Y2K a springboard to a millennium of excellence, prosperity, and good fun.

Upcoming Events

****Jan. 21-23 – "Space Coast Shell Festival"** sponsored by the Astronaut Trail Shell Club at the Melbourne Auditorium, 625 E. Hibiscus in downtown Melbourne, FL. Contact Bobbi Cordy at 385 Needle Blvd., Merritt

Island, FL 32953 – Phone (407) 452-5736 or E-mail cordy@yourlink.net.

****Mar. 2-5 – Sanibel Shell Show**, Sanibel, FL at the Sanibel Community Center, Periwinkle Way. Contact Richard Willis, 5305 Darby Court, Cape Coral, FL 33904, Phone (941) 540-7380 or E-mail Rrwillis@ix.netcom.com.

****Mar. 9-11 – Marco Island Shell Club Show XIX**, Marco Is., FL at the Wesleyan United Methodist Church, Barfield Road. Contact Jean Sungheim, P.O. Box 633, Marco Island, FL 34145, Phone (941) 642-7247.

****Mar. 24-26 – Palm Beach County Shell Club Show**, Riviera Beach Marina, 180 E. 13th Street, Riviera Beach, FL. Contact Carole Marshall, 932 Cochran Drive, Lake Worth, FL 33461, Phone (561) 582-2148, E-mail Marshalldg@aol.com, or see the club's web page at <http://www.gopbi.com/community/groups/PBCshell>.

Y2K Jacksonville Shell Club Meeting Schedule

Club Program Chairperson Cathy Williams has confirmed the following meeting dates for the coming year. All meetings will take place at the Southeast Branch Public Library and begin at 7:00 PM.

- Wednesday, March 22nd
- Thursday, April 27th
- Thursday, May 25th
- Thursday, June 22nd
- Thursday, July 27th
- Thursday, August 24th
- Thursday, September 28th
- Thursday, October 26th
- Monday, November 20th

Annual Christmas Party

By Bill Lyerly

The Jacksonville Shell Club's annual Christmas Party was held Saturday evening, December 11th, at the home of Billie and Paul Brown in Jacksonville Beach with 30 members in attendance.

The party began with *hors d'oeuvres* (or finger food) and liquid refreshment. During this time, partyers who had not seen Paul's handiwork in home decorating, made the tour, including the fireplace, master bathroom and wall moldings. Of course, there is a shell motif. Beautiful work, Paul!

What little was left of the finger food was removed and replaced with platters of roast beef, turkey, venison and favorite dishes brought by the members. This was

followed by a table full of desserts, including a birthday cake for Charlotte Lloyd.

A tradition at our Christmas parties has been the gift exchange, and this year was no exception. However, agreement could not be reached as to just how the exchange would take place. Would it be traditional Chinese or modified or whatever? Our illustrious president (Harry Lee) took charge, and after considerable discussion, several votes, more discussion, a decision was made. What was the decision? Anyway, the exchange took place and everyone left with a gift, hopefully not the one they brought.

A great time was enjoyed by all, and thank you, Billie and Paul, for hosting a wonderful party.

Bay Scallop Season 99 – continued from page 1.

At first we looked and looked but didn't find any scallops. Finally, I asked a man nearby who was practically dragging his big bag of scallops back to the boat: "How are you finding all those?" The key, he told me, was to slide along the turtle grass in your bare feet and when you bump into a scallop reach down and grab it.

That seemed like a good way to also find the resident stingrays and some rather pugilistic crabs, so I stuck my head down into the turtle grass and parted the long fronds with my hands. Right there in front of me was a scallop about two-inches across. And not just a normal Bay Scallop, but an orange one! Within minutes I had collected over a dozen scallops, of which two were orange and another the very uncommon yellow form. Interestingly, that turned out to be the only all-yellow specimen I found all year.

After filling my bag, I got back in the boat and looked the shells over to decide which I'd keep. Naturally, the yellow and orange ones were keepers, but under a cover of algae and other natural camouflage, the shells all looked pretty interesting. Some seemed to have big rays of white on a dark background, while still others appeared to have unusual spots and blotches of white. These were a far cry from the small, drab gray specimens I had seen in pictures and at the dealer's. Not knowing exactly what was under all the grunge, I decided to keep most of them.

I went back in the water and now I was finding scallops everywhere. I also found several nice *Busycon sinistrum* (Lightning Whelk) buried in the muddy sand, but left them. A while later I came across a *Fasciolaria tulipa* (about 90 mm.) browsing among the turtle grass. I almost wanted to keep this one since the shell was a beautiful blue-gray color, but again I decided against it.

After a few hours and a quick lunch, we motored off

to look for other areas where we might find some different mollusks. The other family had actually found six large *Pleuroploca gigantea* (Horse Conch) a few years back in the southern part of the bay, but because of the wind, the water was getting too murky to see much from the boats. We stopped at a few spots to explore, but all I found was a *Chicoreus pomum* (Apple Murex) making a meal of a Bay Scallop.

By about 3:30 that afternoon we headed back to Eagle Harbor since the wind was gusting even higher by that point. I didn't think I had much of a haul, a small bucket of scallops and one *Chicoreus pomum*, but it had been fun and I knew we could always come back later in the summer.

We stayed overnight in Apalachicola, then drove back to Tallahassee the next day, stopping to make a run out to Dog Island, but the wind made the trip unpleasant, so we just decided to go on home.

Once there, I noticed that all the scallops had opened up and were dead. By that evening all it required was a brisk shake of the open shells to dump out the scallops, then into a bleach bath they went. Within half an hour I began to see the true beauty of the shells under all that marine growth. The scallops were nothing like what I had seen before. These shells were surprisingly nice, with bright white spots and stripes on a brownish black background. The lighter side (plain white in the shells I had seen before) displayed a variety of markings from a few tan splotches at the umbones area to others that were heavily patterned with dark browns and blue-grays.

After a good scrubbing with a stiff wire brush and a fast dip in a very diluted solution of muriatic acid, I was stunned at how beautiful these shells were. No two were alike and the orange and yellow specimens were utterly spectacular (at least to my eyes). I knew then that I had to go back again to see if I could find more of the colorful specimens, as well as some of the more heavily patterned "typical" shells.

Fortunately, I didn't have to wait long. A few weeks later we returned to the same spot, half expecting that few scallops would be left considering how many people were out scalloping this year. Even the newspapers reported record numbers of scallopers out (and a number of stiff fines issued for those who took more than the legal limit). We were pleasantly surprised to find there were almost as many shells as the last time we had been there.

We began at Black Island about 9:00 AM. By 11:00 AM, however, a nasty thunderstorm came up and we huddled under the boat's Bimini top and ate lunch. It was still raining at noon, but by then the tide had dropped so low that many of us were literally stranded in the shallow water. But with the water only a few feet deep, we were able to walk across the grass flats in the

rain, picking up scallops when we saw some or bumped into them with our feet (in old boat shoes, of course, since earlier a young boy had to have a rather large, ill-tempered crab removed by force from his foot).



Busycotypus spiratus
St. Joe Bay (left) & St. Marks (right)

About an hour later, the tide had come back in enough that I could drag the boat across the flats and into deeper water, and though it was still drizzling, we went off to explore some new areas. Close to the west shore of the bay, we actually found what must have been hundreds of scallops literally sitting on top of the turtle grass, as well as a small *Pleuroploca gigantea* (which I didn't take) and a nice yellow *Busycotypus spiratus* (Pear Whelk) (which I kept). In the sandy areas there were many empty scallop shells from previous visitors who had caught them and shucked the scallops on the spot, then discarded the shells. I could take all the shells I wanted here without feeling guilty about killing the little critters, so I tossed back a lot of the scallops we had gotten around Black Island, except for the orange ones and a few of the specimens with what appeared to have spectacular patterns.

Within weeks I had started sending these shells to other collectors here in the U. S. and some overseas. All agreed that they had never seen such gorgeous *A. irradians concentricus*. One dealer even told me that these simply had to be *A. irradians irradians*, as the *A. irradians concentricus* were never this nice!

In late August, my wife's sister and her husband flew out to visit us. After our tales of scalloping St. Joe, they wanted to try their hand at it. We were shocked when we arrived to find almost no scallops at all around Black Island. Other boats were out, and their inhabitants all

expressed surprise that so few scallops were present. We wondered if the scallopers had finally tapped out the resident population.

Moving to the southwest corner of the bay, we started finding a good number of scallops in shallow areas that had less dense beds of turtle grass. We also found huge numbers of empty shells. We spent the day cruising from spot-to-spot, but it turned out that there was only the one area that harbored many scallops at all. Again, other boaters stopped to ask us about the vanishing mollusks, but we had no answers. As a guess, I thought that it might be related to the hot dry weather we were experiencing which had raised water temperatures to around the 90-degree mark, possibly driving the scallops into deeper, cooler water.

When we got home, I called the Department of Fish and Game and asked if they knew where we could find scallops. "St. Marks" was the answer. The person I spoke to said he had gotten his limit there within two hours. So the next day we packed our snorkel gear and a cooler of drinks and headed for St. Marks, just 35 miles south of Tallahassee.

It wasn't hard to know where to look - we just followed the line of boats headed for the most popular area. Once in the water, we immediately saw many scallops. We also noticed that these specimens were markedly larger than the ones we had found at St. Joe, several approaching the three-inch mark.

The grass flats at St. Marks are considerably different than those at St. Joe Bay. Not only is the water a few feet deeper, but there are many more types of sea grasses present, and here the scallops seemed to prefer settling on the sandy areas among the grass areas making them quite easy to see, even from the boat. We found quite a few nice large specimens (including several spectacular orange ones), and I even discovered a beautiful four-inch yellow sea horse clinging to some grasses. Everyone was in awe, since they had never seen a sea horse "in the wild" before. This guy curled his tail around my finger and seemed quite content to stay there, but we wanted to try a few other areas, so we sent him back to his grassy home after taking some photos.

Despite the fact that scallop season had been officially open for almost two months, the number of scallops here was amazing. We also found a few nice *Fasciolaria tulipa* and even a colorful *Busycon sinistrum* in one of the deeper areas. Though we didn't find another yellow specimen, we found several scallops in which the lower (lighter) valve was mostly bright yellow.

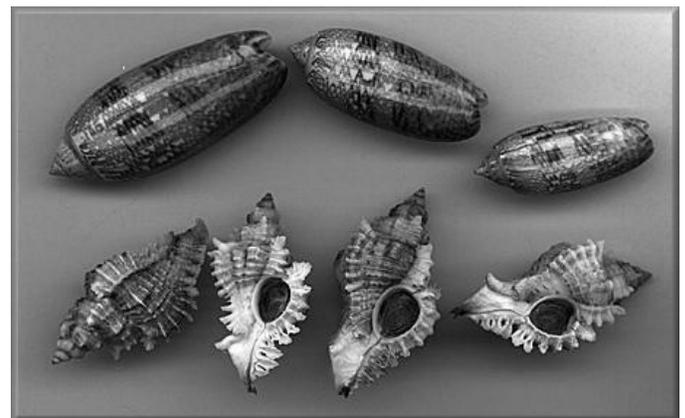
Once we returned home and cleaned our catch, we quickly saw that the St. Marks scallops were not only larger, but quite different in appearance. These specimens had more of a brownish coloration, and very few had the bold white rays and spots that the St. Joe

shells displayed.

As summer (and scallop season) began to wind down, we hit St. Marks several more times and were shocked to find that there were actually more live scallops than we had seen previously. In some spots, you could dive down and pick up 5-6 in one spot, swim a few yards and pick up 5-6 more. They were quite literally everywhere.

On about September 26th, I finally took my boat out to a spot called Dog Ballard Reef. This is about nine miles out from the St. Marks boat ramp. It's basically an artificial reef that was created around a natural reef area and is in about 25 feet of water. Previous attempts to dive here were doomed because of bad visibility (and once because of a faulty regulator), but this day I was determined to get down and see what was there.

I pulled myself down the anchor line and soon was in a veritable undersea garden. The artificial reef was created by dropping a huge number of concrete culverts into the water. This had been done just a few years ago, but already almost every inch of space was covered with gorgeous soft corals and brightly colored sponges, as well as blue tunicates, seawhips and a variety of other sea life. At some points I was simply surrounded by thousands of small silver fish; at other times, Atlantic Spadefish swam up to take a look at me or I would come upon a curious grouper. This place was not like any coral reef I had ever dived, but it was full of life and simply magical. I wished I had brought my underwater camera with me.



Oliva sayana and *Chicoreus florifer dilectus* from St. Joe Bay

I swam around and found a few dark-colored *Strombus alatus* (Florida Fighting Conch) out in the open sandy areas, a few *Fasciolaria tulipa* buried in the sand, and several *Chicoreus florifer dilectus* (Lace Murex). I even found a foot-long horse conch chowing-down on one of the murexes. I also found one *Hexaplex fulvescens* (Giant Atlantic Murex) sitting atop a bare spot of concrete. This was the distinctive "wreck" form which is smaller and has more (but shorter) spines and a

longer siphonal canal.

As I swam around in wonder, out of the corner of my eye I saw what at first I thought might have been a *Nodipecten nodosus fragosus* (Lion's Paw), but knew that they were not found in such shallow water. I could see that the bottom valve was buried in the sand, and as I got closer, the top valve slammed shut, effectively making the shell invisible since the top was covered with sand and the usual growth of algae and such. What could this be, I wondered. As I lifted it out of the sand, I saw that it wasn't as large as I had at first thought, and after careful inspection decided that this was actually an *Argopecten irradians concentricus*, but a big one, and much heavier than any of the shallow water shells we had found. I looked around and found several more, but by this point I was running short on air. I cursed myself for not renting a second tank and headed for the boat.

After cleaning up these "reef" scallops, I clearly saw that they are quite different than the grass flats forms. They are much heavier, and all measured over three inches across. The tops had black or dark gray ribs with white between them. Oddly enough, near the umbonal area several had a dusty rose color with some white spots that almost looked painted on. Another specimen had a dusky gold color. All had almost pure white bottom valves.

Before it gets too cold I am hoping to make one more trip out to Dog Ballard Reef this year. This time I will take at least a couple of extra tanks. At 25 feet, you can pretty much spend as much time underwater as you can stand without any risk of decompression illness.

It has been a remarkable summer - one that I will never forget. My shell collection is bursting with *Argopecten irradians concentricus*, some flamboyantly marked, others somberly plain, but each one of them is much more than I ever had expected from a species that I had previously assumed to be drab and really not worth collecting. What's more, the many specimens I sent overseas have brought a number of interesting shells in exchange.

For most of my life I have hated summer. It's too hot, too humid. For the first time ever, I cannot wait for next summer. That in itself is even more remarkable than the unexpectedly provident scallop harvest of 1999.

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Happy New Year From Your Newsletter Staff!

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