Rooiels web site – SHELLS (Chris Burlock)

Unfortunately as more and more people frequent our shores, so the number of sea shells to be found on our beaches declines! This is probably due to several causes – including from the casual collecting of shells by people wanting a keepsake through to the increased pollution and acidification of our oceans which is making it harder for living molluscs to form shells.

The lack of shells on our shores also affects other marine life such as hermit crabs who move into empty shells for protection and needing to find larger shells as they grow. Many small fish and larvae of other sea creatures use empty shells to shelter in and hide from predators. Even when broken up, shells enrich the beach sand better enabling plants to stabilise the dunes.

So next time you are tempted to pick up a sea shell…think again…and preferably leave it where it is *needed*!

Above the sea shore you might find remains of ancient shell middens. These were created thousands of years ago when the first people took advantage of low, low spring tides to collect and eat shellfish. All middens are protected by law and may not be disturbed.

Some shell specimens you might be lucky enough to spot in the Rooi Els area:

**The Venus Ear** or **Siffie** (*Haliotis spadicea*) an ear shaped gatropod that looks like a small version of a Perlemoen.

**Perlemoen** (*Haliotis midae*) When found on the shore they usually indicate that poachers have been at work, pushing this mollusc closer to extinction!

Large clams include the **White mussel** (*Donax serra*) with a purple inside and yellow exterior and the **Streaked sand clam** (*Tivela compressa*), with sunshine-like rays of brown and cream on the exterior.

**Dwaf Fan shells** (*Chlamys tincta* ) These colourful little bivalves have a single fin at its base, where the larger **Scallop** (*Pecten sulcicostatus*) has 2 fins.

**Plough shells** (*Bullia*) Live Plough molluscs are usually found ploughing into the beach where the waves subside and some folks say they indicate safe swimming areas. Molluscs that swim and have a are usually carnivorous and Plough shells are like the hyenas of the ocean, quickly eating up any dead fish or jelly fish they find.

**Marginellas** are small and pretty gastropods with smooth, shiny shells and a strong, lipped aperture with 3-5 ridges on the inner lip.

**Baby’s toes** (Trivia aperta) are cute, pink, cowrie-shaped shells with ridges running right over the shell.

**Violet shells** (*Janthina*) are very fragile blue/purple shells

Some 18 species of **Limpets** can be seenalong our shores. **Keyhole** limpet shells have holes at their apex through which a syphon protrudes.

**Mussels**. NB you must have a permit (available at any Post Office) to collect live mussels.

**Paper Nautilus** (*Argonauta argo*) This is the egg case of an octopus-like cephalopod. Nautilus shells can be washed onto shore in winter but few survive the waves or seagulls!

**Chitons.** These molluscs create eight overlapping shell plates over their backs. Slow-moving creatures, they can often be seen sheltering under rocks in tidal pools. We have some 10 different species in our area.