



Conus marmoreus Linne

THE MALACOLOGICAL SOCIETY OF AUSTRALASIA Inc. VICTORIAN BRANCH BULLETIN

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NOTICE OF MEETING

The next meeting of the Branch will be held on the 16th April at the Melbourne Camera Club Building, cnr. Dorcas & Ferrars Sts South Melbourne at 8pm. Topic will be 5 favourite self-collected shells.

The next meeting will be held on June 18th.

Meetings for the remainder of 2018

It has been decided to reduce the number of meetings of the Victorian Branch of the Malacological Society of Australasia from 9 per year to 6.

Dates for 2018 are: Date Topic

June 18th – 10 Shells from your favourite family

August 20th – Range extensions or unusual locations

October 15th – Angus Hawke will speak on fossils

November 19th – Christmas meeting “Mega” buy/swap/sell

Each meeting will also be an opportunity to trade or sell any shells or books – so come along, you never know what you might find and the more people who attend the better!

Currently Branch Bulletin issues from VBB169- 288 can be accessed via the Society’s website which includes an index 1-276 . http://www.malsocaus.org/?page_id=91

Bulletins mentioned in this issue prior to 169 can be obtained from the editors in PDF form on request.

Secretary / Treasurer Michael Lyons Tel. No. 9894 1526

Vale Norm Cryer

We have recently been informed of the death of long time, past member Norm Cryer. From the early eighties until 2006 Norm was co-librarian with Alena Bubenicek and served on the committee for several years. Norm was a quiet private person, a collector who had good knowledge of shells of all families and he amassed a large and interesting collection. Known for his long solo beach walks, particularly around the south east of South Australia and reporting what he had collected.

He was most interested in other people's projects and was always ready to help or supply specimens. Norm was also a collector who collected anything that was of interest and had museum like displays at his home. After being in poor health in his later years and unable to attend meetings, his family offered up his collection for sale and a number of our members were able to obtain some of his shells. His quiet presence at our meetings was missed by all of us who knew him.

Don Cram

Mrs M.E. Freame of Seaholme

The following short notice (Victorian Naturalist 87 (6): 161, June 1970) relates to the disposal of the museum collection assembled over the years by Mrs Freame at her home in Seaholme (near Altona).

"The Freame Marine Collection

It may be of some interest to those members who knew the late Mrs. M. E. Freame of Altona, to learn that her collection of marine specimens has been purchased by the Rosebud Aquarium and Museum.

Showcases will shortly be made for its reception. It is expected that it will be on public exhibition later in the year."

The Rosebud Aquarium and Museum was undoubtedly that formed by J. McKenzie Sloss, an early member of the Malacological Society of Australia. He had travelled widely and had collected extensively in a number of out-of-the-way places like the Amazon area of Brazil. He was proud of his collection of large freshwater apple snails, had good contacts with British and European malacologists studying these shells, his specimens being mentioned in some of their papers.

The fate of the Rosebud Aquarium and Museum and of the J. McKenzie Sloss collection is unknown to me. Each time I collect the aglajid seaslug *Melanochlamys queritor* (Burn, 1957), I think of Mrs Freame. She had found this species at Seaholme many years before I did, and had sent the specimen(s) to Joyce Allan at the Australian Museum, Sydney for identification. Joyce Allan responded that in her opinion it was an undescribed species. When Mrs Freame learned that I was about to describe it as a new species, she objected strongly, arguing that as she had found it first, it was hers to describe. Despite, or perhaps in spite of, her protestations, my description went ahead and in a not too subtle way, I named the species in her honour. The word *queritor* is latin, meaning "to complain vehemently, to complain excessively."

Robert Burn

Diving at Point Franklin with Simon Wilson

Conditions were quite good but it was a little disconcerting to see a large dredging ship sitting just offshore as we drove down to Portsea. Parking in the usual spot and gearing up for the trudge down the beach, it was good to see that the ship had cleared out and we were on our own. We entered the water on the west side of Point Franklin to avoid negotiating the rocks and had a long northerly surface swim out for about 200m before resting and then going down into about 8 m of water. Visibility was not outstanding. We had missed most of the seagrass areas and headed roughly north over undulating sand dunes and rubble patches stopping to look at interesting items on the way.

The area wasn't highly productive for molluscs but by tracking in sand were able to locate a nice *Duplicaria kieneri* and several *Alcospira edithae*. Also crawling on sand was *Mitrella menkeana*, dead *Acrosterigma cygnorum* and *Pratulum thetidis* were also present. Also found was a fresh dead *Litozamia brazieri*. A single nice *Cymatiella verrucosa* was found on rubble along with a very large *Sigapatella calyptraeiformis* on a dead bivalve. *Amoria undulata*, *Penion mandarinus* and several *Pleuroploca australasiae* were seen but left.

After leaving the rubble ground I headed back over the weedy areas finding a couple of nice *Notogibbula cf lehmani*. Back in about 8-10 m some extensive ledges were found and a nice pair of *Lyria mitraeiformis* including one with rust staining. A fresh dead *Dentrimitrella semiconvexa* was picked up on a sand patch. Getting low on air I surfaced and made my way back to the pier to exit and wait for the others to return. A yet to be identified *Ischnochiton* was also collected off the rubble possibly *Ischnochiton fruticosus*.

Geoff Macauley

Fond memories of Hope from the Griffiths family.

Subsequent to my 2012 article in VBB 265 on the mysterious disappearance of Lt.Col.Robert John Griffiths, in October 2015 I was contacted by email from England by his daughter Frances, which has resulted in the story of his life and achievements being published in 2016. A later email contained the following :- “When you see Hope, please pass on my very best wishes and let her know that she will always be remembered in the Griffiths household with fond memories. I attach a photo of Hope taken in Mooroolbark at Col. and Mrs Slee’s house.”

While working on his *Notocypraea* review between 1958 and 1960, Col. Griffiths (John to his friends, spent time at the National Museum of Victoria (now Museum Victoria) where at the time Hope Black (née Macpherson) was Curator of Molluscs and became friends with the Griffiths family. After returning to England for about two years, the family bought Sea Acres Nature Park at Port Macquarie and in 1962 Hope visited them and took one of the photos in VBB 265 of the shell display.

The 2012 article was a result of discussions with Hope and since this and the subsequent story in 2016 we occasionally visited her at the retirement home in Mornington and were pleased to know that she had a copy of the final story and to see her delight that it was published. At the end of Platon’s obituary VBB 291, was a link to the Museum Victoria where many of Hope’s photos are recorded. Item (15211) taken at the home of Col. Slee at Moorlbank, prompted this response from Fran.

“I am very happy that you publish the photo of Hope that I sent you – thank you for the link to the house in Mooroolbark, they were both taken on the same day and also taken on the same day was the photo of my parents and myself that you published in Bulletin 265. If you look at that photo (15211) you can see my fathers back (in a white shirt) to the left of the man holding a child.”

John Griffiths died in 1986 and his wife Audrey stayed on in Australia until 1992 when she returned to England and lived with Fran and her husband Brian until her death in 2012. In July last year Val and I spent a pleasant week at their home in Somerset England. Fran is delighted that her father’s story has been told and we have formed a lifetime friendship with them both.

Reference

Cram D.J. 2016 Lt.Col.Robert John Griffiths (9 Feb 1915 – 31 Oct 1986) : the forgotten pioneer.
American Conchologist 44(2) 10-14



Hope Macpherson (left) at Col. Slee’s house at Moorlbank 1960.
Photo taken by John Griffiths.



Audrey John and Fran Griffiths taken by Hope on the same day. (Not at Sea Acres as in VBB 265)



← Fran and Brian Jolly
Christmas 2016

Left (item 15211) Hope’s photo of Col. Slee’s house.
John Griffiths in the white shirt second from left.
Taken from Museum Victoria’s website.

Don Cram

Notes on thirty seven years of diving at Portsea.

Way back on the 30th January 1980, at the age of 17, I did my first scuba dive at Portsea. Although I did not record if I collected any shells (although I am sure I did), I did note that the bay was mirror calm and that I saw a cuttlefish.

For the next 25 years I only visited sporadically, perhaps 5 times per year, often just snorkeling and often with a sieve. Highlights in those early years included finding my first live *Amoria undulata*, a dead *Bassina disjecta* with both valves and an *Argonauta nodosus*.

From 2006 onwards I have dived at Portsea at least 25 times per year with Simon Wilson, Geoff Macaulay and more recently Lynton Stephens and Angus Hawke.

Over this time I have documented molluscs, fish and to a lesser extent echinoderms and crustaceans.

Even after all these years I am still adding new species to my list of molluscs. At present my species list stands at 305. The most recent addition to the list was the small 'canoe shell', *Tornatina apicina*, which was found at the end of a fine sand trail in 12 metres of water.

Rarities

Some rarities that stand out include:

Chiton exoptanda One specimen only. This was collected at night crawling over a dead ostrea valve in 18 metres of water

Chiton bednalli Two specimens only. Both were from around 12 metres of water at night. One was found ploughing through the sand

Astele subcarinatum - Back on the 24th April 2007 I found a very dead (with the spire broken off) shell belonging to this species. It was not until 19th November 2013 when the next specimen was found, again dead, but large (41mm in diameter) and in good condition. Interestingly it was on my very next night dive that I collected a live specimen. Now this shell is a prized find but I would rate it as uncommon.

Turbo gruneri – I collected a total of 3 small specimens of this shell between December 2006 and July 2007. No more shells were found until 2013. The animal inhabits sand and seagrass generally in 12-18 metres of water. Since the summer of 2014 reasonable numbers of this shell have been found

Cassis pyrum – In our early days of diving we did a lot of diving over the marine sand dunes found 50-100 metres off the end of the pier. It was here that most of the examples of this shell is found. I can't recall having seen a live example since 2012.

Amalda marginata – was very rare. Was a Holy Grail species and Simon found the first live example on Cup Weekend 2006 in 3.5 metres of water. Since that time it has become relatively common to find individuals of this species. *Amalda fusiformis* is a mystery - can be found quite fresh dead but never alive.

Lyria mitraeformis – Simon Wilson established my first record of this species. He collected a shell in the possession of a hermit crab in July 2006 and the first living example on the night of 7th December 2006. I did not find this shell until 17th September 2009. Nowadays it is regarded as a good find and I would still rate it 'reasonably uncommon'.

Typhis yatesi – The discovery of this species from sand and rubble in 17 metres of water would rate as one of my best finds. On a wintery night on 3rd July 2013 I found a specimen crawling on sand. 20 minutes later on the same dive I found another live example partially buried in sand some distance away. This was the first hint, alive or dead, that this species lives here. To date only 5 shells have been found.

Terebra albida – A 'Holy grail' species for me. My first record is of a dead specimen on 24th April 2007. Again Simon is the 'expert' at finding this elusive species, collecting a live example (with the faint chestnut spotting near the suture as described in MMV) from 9+ metres on the night of 26th December 2008 and another just recently on 17th February this year. My records are scant with "a small live specimen from the deep rubble ground" in late 2013. I did collect 4 nice dead specimens from the beach at Point King in January 2014 but have not seen any on the beach on subsequent visits – nor did we see even a trace of them during a dive off Point King later that January.

Notochlamys hexactes – Back on the 24th April 2004 I found two live shells from 4 metres of water under the Sorrento Pier. At Portsea I had found the occasional valve and one dead intact specimen and on 1st April 2009 I found my first live shell, a stunning red example over 50mm wide from under an overhang in 11 metres. The shell remained elusive for many years until July 2012 when Simon 'cracked the code' of where they could be found. Now, although not rare, the collection of a nice specimen still elicits oohs and aahs!

Spondylus tenellus – On our very first dive together in 2006, Simon found a heavily overgrown shell in quite shallow water west of the pier but did not collect it. I collected a live example on 17th September 2009 from reef under a canopy of Eklonia weed. Specimens have turned up with reasonable regularity since the discovery of the deep rubble ground off Point Franklin.

Bassina disjecta - Always hard to find as they are usually buried in the substrate. When swimming over sand in 8-11 metres they can be found by looking for their 'small' white coloured siphons. More often than not they are actually found lying on top of the substrate (where they are sometimes attacked by the Muricid, *Pterochelus triformis*).

Humphreyia strangei – Possibly due to the fact that this shell lives embedded in sponge this shell is very rare. I have collected 2 living and 1 dead shell over the years.

With the exception of *Typhis yatesi* and *Terebra albida* all of the classic Portsea rarities can be found quite easily once their habitat becomes known and one gets one's eye in.

'Super rarities'

Ultra rare shells, of which less than 5 specimens have been found include:

Conus clarus – 1 dead only

Conus rutilus – 2 dead only

Notocypraea angustata – Simon found a fragment and I found a dead nearby at the Quarantine Station.

Separatista helicoides – 1 dead only

Calliostoma armillata – although reasonably common in Westernport, Waratah bay and elsewhere along the coast this shell remains elusive at Portsea, with a couple of live and a couple of dead specimens seen. (although several specimens have been found during a recent night dives)

Philippia lutea - Geoff Macaulay collected a dead specimen in April of this year.

The bizarre

Equichlamys bifrons – dead valves only – sub fossil

Gomphinella undulosa – very common on the beach. Never seen live. One shell with conjoined valves collected in 2009. Abundant in sand in 11-15 metres off Shelly Beach San Remo.

Possible recent extinction?

Xenostrobus pulex – this small mussel shell formed small dense mats on flat intertidal rocks adjacent to the pier. The erosion that has taken place subsequent to dredging appears to have wiped them out.

Interesting phenomena

Macra jacksonensis – Over the years this species has proved to be a 'boom and bust' species, with the shell being abundant some years and not seen during others. These bivalves are also responsible for an amazing sight when they 'migrate' 1 to 2 metres up into the water column in their countless thousands to drift with the current, looking like an underwater snowstorm – for what purpose I do not know.

Notocypraea piperita – This shell was common in the mid-2000s but has been rare in recent years (another possible 'boom and bust' species).

The introduced

Maoricolpus roseus – Unfortunately this shell has been turning up in live condition. Luckily it is still rare.

Michael Lyons

Meeting notes of the February 2018

Simon Wilson provided a report on the 13th Australian International Shell Show held in Fremantle WA during the weekend 9th, 10th, 11th of February at the Fremantle Football Club. Simon reported that there were only 3 Victorian attendees and not a lot of international dealers/visitors. The first two days of the show were well attended; however, Sunday's attendances were disappointing. He found it to be a very social show and was well organised by Merv Cooper. Many WA shell dealers were present with shells for sale ranging from \$100 to \$40,000. What was disappointing was that very few of the general public attended.

Simon also advised he had been contacted by David Berschauer from the San Diego Shell Club regarding their quarterly publication, The Festivus. It is nicely produced and available at a reasonable cost.

Michael Lyons showed his finds collected over the summer months. Highlights include *Cypraea xanthodon* from extreme end of range at Merimbula NSW; a *Clanculus maugeri* from Merimbula; live collected *Epidironea hedleyi* from Eden; *Daphnella botanica* from Merimbula; plus, a number of locally collected shells taken whilst diving.

Geoff Macaulay showed recent finds including *Callista kingie* and *Parviterebra brazieri* from Brighton; *Lorica angasi*, *Calliostoma hedleyi* and *Amoria undulata* from Stony Point; *Spondylus tenellus* and an unusual chiton, c.f. *Mucrosquama verconis* from Portsea.

Angus Hawke showed an example of the extremely rare southern Western Australian volute, *Nanamoria weaveri*; examples of the two forms of the NSW Haliotid, *Haliotis brazieri*; and a ‘freak’ example of *Guildfordia yoka*. Angus also showed some stunning fossil volutes; *Livonia stevensi* from Tasmania and *Livonia hannaefordi* from Victoria. He also had a fragment of an unnamed cowry shell that is reminiscent of the southern African *Cypraea capensis* from an undisclosed location.

Bruce Livett brought in some posters and postcards depicting ‘Colours of the Coral Sea’, ‘sharks and rays of Northern Australian rivers’ and ‘Standardising the flora and fauna classification of Australian Marine Images’, published by the Marine Biodiversity Hub (www.nespmarine.edu.au) based in Tasmania and kindly donated them to members present.

Michael Lyons

CAN OYSTERS HEAR?

A recent edition of “Cosmos” (summer edition 2018) has a short and extremely inconclusive article which discusses the possibility that molluscs can react to sound. A team at the University of Bordeaux, France, apparently decided to experiment with the hearing abilities of oysters. As oyster farming is such an important industry in many parts of the world, it was felt to be interesting to find out if increasing levels of underwater noise could possibly be having an effect on the wellbeing of the oysters.

The researchers set up two groups of the molluscs in tanks fitted with speakers and then they broadcast a range of single-frequency tones at different volumes for a set length of time. The oysters were observed during this time to see whether they opened or closed their shells. It was found that low frequency tones between 10 and 200 hertz (the lower the frequency the lower the note, and the very low frequencies produce more of a rumble than a distinct note) seemed to have an effect and the valves would close. There appeared to be little or no reaction to higher frequencies – those that we are familiar with when listening to normal speech or melodies.

It was suggested that the noises generated by the action of waves on rocks and shores could vary as the tides move up and down, and this would trigger the opening and closing of oysters – presuming that such activity would be necessary for them on a regular basis. It was also suggested that human-generated deep rumbles, such as those emanating from passing ships, could affect the normal life pattern of the oysters, possibly with detrimental effects.

My advice to oyster farmers is not to bother playing sweet music to them and not to bother telling them how much you love them. Just protect them, if you can, from loud rumbling noises and enjoy the jangly noise of the cash registers instead, to say nothing of the salty taste.

Alan Monger

Freshwater mussels

Shell morphology of Australian freshwater mussels is very plastic and has led to the creation of many names for few species. A recent paper (Sheldon, 2017) draws attention to five species that occur in the Murray-Darling and Lake Eyre drainage basins, only two of which are named species. Molecular data separates three undescribed species from each other and from the named species. The distributions of the five species are listed as follows.

Velesunio ambiguus (Philippi, 1847) – widely throughout the east coast of Australia including inland and coastal drainages from South Australia to the Burdekin River, Queensland.

Alathyria jacksoni Iredale, 1934 – lower sections of rivers within the Murray- Darling Basin.

Velesunio sp. A – Cooper Creek and Diamantina River in Lake Eyre Basin.

Velesunio sp. B – Cooper Creek in Lake Eyre Basin, genetically closely related to *Alathyria jacksoni*.

Velesunio sp. D – Cooper Creek in Lake Eyre Basin.

Reference

Sheldon, F., 2017. Variable plasticity in shell morphology of some Australian freshwater mussels (Unionoida, Hyriidae). *Transactions of the Royal Society of South Australia* 141 (2): 193-208.

PS. Two curious spelling errors were noted in this paper. In the title the ordinal name should be Unionida, not Unionoida. The species name in *Velesunio ambiguous* is correctly *ambiguus*.

Robert Burn