



The Book of Shells: A Life-Size Guide to Identifying and Classifying Six Hundred Seashells

M. G. Harasewych, Fabio Moretzsohn

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Who among us hasn't marveled at the diversity and beauty of shells? Or picked one up, held it to our ear, and then gazed in wonder at its shape and hue? Many a lifelong shell collector has cut teeth (and toes) on the beaches of the Jersey Shore, the Outer Banks, or the coasts of Sanibel Island. Some have even dived to the depths of the ocean. But most of us are not familiar with the biological origin of shells, their role in explaining evolutionary history, and the incredible variety of forms in which they come.

Shells are the external skeletons of mollusks, an ancient and diverse phylum of invertebrates that are in the earliest fossil record of multicellular life over 500 million years ago. There are over 100,000 kinds of recorded mollusks, and some estimate that there are *over a million more* that have yet to be discovered. Some breathe air, others live in fresh water, but most live in the ocean. They range in size from a grain of sand to a beach ball and in weight from a few grams to several hundred pounds. And in this lavishly illustrated volume, they finally get their full due.

The Book of Shells offers a visually stunning and scientifically engaging guide to six hundred of the most intriguing mollusk shells, each chosen to convey the range of shapes and sizes that occur across a range of species. Each shell is reproduced here at its actual size, in full color, and is accompanied by an explanation of the shell's range, distribution, abundance, habitat, and operculum—the piece that protects the mollusk when it's in the shell. Brief scientific and historical accounts of each shell and related species include fun-filled facts and anecdotes that broaden its portrait.

The Matchless Cone, for instance, or *Conus cedonulli*, was one of the rarest shells collected during the eighteenth century. So much so, in fact, that a specimen in 1796 was sold for more than six times as much as a painting by Vermeer at the same auction. But since the advent of scuba diving, this shell has become far more accessible to collectors—though not without certain risks. Some species of *Conus* produce venom that has caused more than thirty known human deaths.

The Zebra Nerite, the Heart Cockle, the Indian Babylon, the Junonia, the Atlantic Thorny Oyster—shells from habitats spanning the poles and the tropics, from the highest mountains to the ocean's deepest recesses, are all on display in this definitive work.

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