

# Beachcomber's Guide **Solway Shells**

Identify common beach shells  
found on the Solway coast

Solway Firth  
  
Partnership





## SOLWAY SHELLS

This guide will help you identify 16 common shells of more than 100 different sea shells found washed up on our beaches. The more you look the more you will find so if your shell does not match those in this guide then search the internet or a seashore nature book to help with identification.

This shell guide was produced as part of the Making the Most of the Coast project managed by Solway Firth Partnership.

This edition of the guide has been reprinted with the kind support of Crown Estate Scotland.



**Crown Estate  
Scotland**

Oighreachd a' Chrùin Alba





## HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

Shells of all shapes and sizes are the hard cases which were the homes of living animals belonging to a group called molluscs. The sea can wash shells over great distances so you may find shells from rocky places on a sandy beach and shells from sandy places on a rocky beach.

Compare your find with the pictures of shells in this guide; although the size and colour may vary, the pictures will show distinctive features which will help you identify what you have collected. Along with a life-size photograph, each page has the popular and scientific name for the shell as well as information about its looks, where it lives and what it eats.





## WHAT SORT OF MOLLUSC?

First you need to discover if it is a gastropod or a bivalve.

**Gastropod** shells have a number of whorls and looks like the snails you find in your garden. One group of gastropods – the limpet – does not have whorls but is shaped like a cone.

**Bivalve** shells have twin shells joined by a hinge. The hinge often breaks so you mostly find only one shell of the pair.

All the gastropod (snail) shells can be found by looking at one side of this guide; on the other side you will find the bivalve (twin shell) shells.



# Common whelk

*Buccinum undatum*

**Looks:** Large spiral shell

**Found:** On sand and mud

**Eats:** Scavenger

## Did you know?

'Wash balls' are clusters of whelk egg capsules found on the strandline.



# Pod razor shell

*Ensis siliqua*

**Looks:** Thin straight-sided shell

**Found:** Buried vertically in sand

**Eats:** Filters food from the sea



## Did you know?

Called “spouts” because they squirt up water as they quickly burrow.



# Flat periwinkle

*Littorina obtusata* / *Littorina fabalis*

**Looks:** Small round shell of many colours

**Found:** On seaweeds

**Eats:** Algae

## Did you know?

There are several kinds of flat periwinkle which are not easy to identify because some only differ in the way they lay their eggs.



# Baltic tellin

*Macoma balthica*

**Looks:** Small shell with a strong hinge so the two halves are often found together

**Found:** In sand

**Eats:** Filters food from the sea



## Did you know?

Common in estuaries because it is tolerant of fresh water. It is a favourite food of wading birds.



# Pelican's foot shell

*Aporrhais pes-pellicani*

**Looks:** A sculptured shell with a flattened 'webbed foot' shaped lip when adult

**Found:** On sand

**Eats:** Feeds on debris on the sea bed



## Did you know?

The 'webbed foot' helps it to glide over sand.

# Rayed trough shell

*Macra stultorum*

**Looks:** A fragile shell often  
purple inside

**Found:** In clean sand

**Eats:** Filters food from the sea



## Did you know?

The light shells are often  
washed up on the  
strandline.



# Common limpet

*Patella vulgata*

**Looks:** A cone shaped shell of many colours, shapes and sizes

**Found:** On rocks

**Eats:** Algae

## Did you know?

The most common of the limpets which wander under water but return before the tide goes out.



# Common mussel

*Mytilus edulis*

**Looks:** Black to blue and/or silver when worn

**Found:** On rocks

**Eats:** Filters particles from water

## Did you know?

The mussel attaches itself to rocks by threads.





# Common winkle

*Littorina littorea*

**Looks:** Largest of the winkles; the colour varies from brown to black

**Found:** On rocks

**Eats:** Algae

## Did you know?

Gathered at low tide, the winkles are sent off to be processed into a seaside snack.



# Striped venus

*Chamelea gallina*

**Looks:** A clam sometimes with reddish coloured rays

**Found:** In clean sand

**Eats:** Filters particles from water

## Did you know?

This pretty shell is the favourite food of many wading birds.





# Dog whelk

*Nucella lapillus*

**Looks:** A snail-shaped shell of many colours, shapes and sizes

**Found:** On rocks

**Eats:** A carnivore

## Did you know?

It drills a straight sided hole to eat barnacles and mussels



# Common cockle

*Cerastoderma edule*

**Looks:** A chubby, ribbed shell

**Found:** In sand and mud

**Eats:** Filters particles from water

## Did you know?

You can tell the age of this highly prized seafood by counting the rings on its shell.





# Grey top shell

*Gibbula cineraria*

# Purple top shell

*Gibbula umbilicalis*

**Looks:** These top shells are very similar but the purple top shell is flatter with more distinct markings

**Found:** On rocks and in rockpools

**Eats:** Algae



## Did you know?

A worn Grey top shell is also called a "silver tommy" when the shiny shell is exposed.

# Queen scallop

*Aequipecten opercularis*

**Looks:** Two curved shells in a variety of colours: red, orange and white

**Found:** On sand and gravel

**Eats:** Filters particles from water

## Did you know?

It can flap away from an approaching predator such as a starfish.







## YOUR SHELL COLLECTION

The first thing to do when you get the shells home is to wash them in cold water. Periostracum, a natural coating, or seaweed and barnacles, often look good attached to the shell.

### **Identifying and labelling**

Lay them out on a table and use this guide to identify what you have found.

### **Display**

Store shells in plastic trays or boxes with a label giving the popular and scientific name and where & when found. If you are making a display, it is a good idea to stick the shells to card.



## ENJOY YOUR SEARCH FOR SHELLS

- Please remember to make sure shells you collect are empty.
  - Rocky shores are particularly rich in seashore life but take care on slippery rocks.
  - Receding tides uncover fascinating wildlife but incoming water can cut you off so check tide times.
- The coastline is a beautiful place so please keep it that way and take your litter home with you.
  - Many creatures live under stones so please lift them carefully and replace gently.
  - Enjoy the outdoors responsibly by following the Scottish Outdoor Access Code / The Countryside Code in England.

