

SHELLS, SHELLS EVERYWHERE THERE'S SHELLS

Ocean beaches aren't the only place to search for mollusks

By Emily Mentzer
The Itemizer-Observer

MONMOUTH — Walking along the beach, you may happen upon a pretty shell and put it in your pocket.

You may not realize you're a shell collector, but Marici Reid would say otherwise.

"I don't see a distinction between a casual beach-comber and a shell collector," said

Reid, president of the Oregon Shell Club and a resident of Independence. "A lot of us (members of the club) are beach-combers."

But Reid prefers to look for shells not on the shore. The best place to look for shells?

"Banks-Vernonia Trail," she said. It's land snails she's after.

"There are so many kinds of snails," Reid said. "We always think about snails being icky and harmful, but there's so many species that are beautiful. There's such diversity out there."

Snail shells — regardless of whether they live in the ocean, rivers and streams, desert or on land — come in a variety of intricate patterns and colors, even though the animals are blind or mostly blind.

Reid's son, Jonathan,

prefers to collect shells that are still alive.

"They're a little more entertaining," he said, smiling. In a small container about the size of a mint tin, he carries two *Oxychilus draparnaudi*, snails no bigger than the fingernail on your pinky finger.

"We found them in the backyard in a damp spot under a rock," he said. "They live near people."

These snails won't threaten the garden and flowers like the traditional garden snail will, Jonathan assured. "They eat decomposing leaves," he said. "They do like some lettuce."

The garden snails are actually invasive and from Europe, Jonathan said. Marici Reid and John Melot led an Oregon Shell Club presentation titled "Shells Around the World" at the Monmouth Public Library on Friday. About a dozen people came to learn about mollusks and get an opportunity to touch a wide variety of shells.

Along the riverbank is another good place to find shells away from the ocean, Marici said.

Two varieties of muscels live in the Willamette River: one native, one invasive.



EMILY MENTZER/Itemizer-Observer
Jonathan Reid prefers to collect shells with the occupants still inside.



EMILY MENTZER/Itemizer-Observer
Marici Reid collects a variety of shells, but is particularly fascinated by land snails and adaptations of animals.

The *Margaritifera falcata* is native. It is larger and looks a little rough around the edges, Marici said.

"When they have their young, they spit them out when they know trout is going by," she said. "The babies latch onto the trout's gills and catch a ride."

The muscels are not parasitic, but more like hitchhikers. "Their life cycle is closely related to the trout," Marici said.

The invasive species is not so picky about how it reproduces, and has adapted to the cold waters of the Willamette.

Originally brought in for food, it wasn't anticipated that the warm-climate, smaller muscels would thrive in Oregon's cold rivers, but they have.

Gracie Chen of Monmouth picked up and studied shells in a box labeled "free shells."

She carefully placed a starfish in her brown paper bag.

"She loves the shells," said her mother, Dalia Miao. "We cannot pick them up on the beach (in China where they are from), but we can buy them in stores, and she bought a lot."

Shells have been used to trade, and some can be quite valuable.

In the 18th century, wendletraps sold for tens — or hundreds — of thousands of dollars, Marici said. It led to people making reproductions out of rice paste. Once people found the source of the shell in the Philippines, they became more common and of less worth.

"Now it's the ones made out of rice paste that are the real gold mine," she said.

For more information or to join the Oregon Shell Club: 503-363-5017; online at sites.google.com/site/oregonshellclub1.



EMILY MENTZER/Itemizer-Observer
Shaun Hibbard examines a wendletrap, a shell once worth hundreds of thousands of dollars, but now quite common. Gracie Chen reaches for an abalone shell.



EMILY MENTZER/Itemizer-Observer
David Craig shows expertise in playing the shells like instruments, thanks in part to his experience playing the trombone. Many shell horns were available to test out.



EMILY MENTZER/Itemizer-Observer
Boxes labeled "free shells" were available to get attendees of "Shells Around the World" started on their own shell collections at the Monmouth Public Library on Friday.

WHAT? 8 HOUR SALE!

Lowest Prices One Day Only!

50% OFF

From 9:00 am to 5:01 pm
Wednesday, Jan. 14 ONLY your advertising rep will take your calls to reserve display ads for one or more issues through Feb. 13th. Sale lasts ONLY 8 HOURS!

Itemizer-Observer 503-623-2373
Call Heidi, Rachel or Karen!