

Solway Superstars

Report by: Norman & Florence Hammond

With the general increase in environmental awareness and biodiversity in our Solway AONB and extensive low water habitats, it is timely to reflect that molluscs are an important part of the Solway fauna and in world terms they are the next largest animal group to insects. Apart from the polar ice caps and the sky, molluscs occupy almost every habitat known to the human race from the deepest ocean to desert, (within our collection are fresh water molluscs which were living some 24 million years ago, beneath the Solway when it was but a stream within a vast jungle.)

The majority of molluscs live in the marine environment, as the many species of seashells that are familiar to everyone, from the common whelk to the exotic cowries.

Marine molluscs also include the brightly coloured sea slugs, octopus, giant clams and thousands more, and as with the land molluscs they occupy virtually every ecological niche. At low water throughout the Solway you can see where they graze, browse, and scavenge whilst others are parasites and predators. They are prey or host to many invertebrates, molluscs included, and important food to members of all the vertebrate phyla. Many species of marine molluscs produce free-swimming larvae, this forms part of the Solway plankton, which in turn helps us with the finest Solway shrimps for local boats to harvest, and also entices the basking shark into the firth.

Shellfish are consumed by people throughout the world, often as a great delicacy and are of economic importance. All local

people will be familiar with the tasty 'Winkle', whilst our 'Mussels' are sought after from far and wide. The 'Common Whelk' or 'Buckie' was a local staple food up to 50 years ago and today is harvested on a grand scale for the far east. Oysters were at one time a major fishery supporting a large number of boats from Maryport and even today remnants of this fishery with Roman origins are to be found.

Shells, pearls, and nacre are all prized mollusc products either for their own beauty or in jewellery and handicrafts.

Humans eat some terrestrial snails and slugs, but chiefly they play an important part in the food web. A few species have become garden pests but all play a valuable part in the breaking down of cellulose from dead and decaying vegetation in the early stages of soil formation.

Fossil shell deposits can tell us much about ancient history as can be seen in many places around the Cardurnock peninsula and the raised beaches of Swarthy Hill, the evolution of land dwelling animals, and the development of the earth itself. The fascinating story of the Romans from the walls and coastal forts inland to Moota and Papcastle all has a direct link with our Solway molluscs.

Generally at low water we will find 'bivalves' or Lamellibranchia, as the name suggests their shells are in two equally hinged parts, which enclose the body, i.e. cockles, mussels, tellins, clams etc whilst close into the Harbour walls on rocky ground and outcrops the Gastropoda is the largest molluscan class, with limpets, sea slugs, and marine snails i.e. winkles, whelks all combining to form a

world total of around 75,000 species.

Solway molluscs have been a subject of close study for many decades now contributing to the Conchological Society of Great Britain & Ireland's UK distribution and mapping survey, now extended to include Europe.

Copies of 'Lakeland Molluscs' by the late Mary Milne and Marjory Garnett published by the Carlisle Natural History Society in March 1966 make very interesting reading for the mollusc's enthusiast and a few are still available at Tullie House, Carlisle.

Frequent local molluscan field meetings take place throughout the year in conjunction with the Silloth Tourist Information Centre and the Discovery Centre. If you would like to know more about our Solway molluscs why not come along and join in the fun with these Solway Superstars?

Abbeytown



Wee Wigwam



The Judges



This years Carnival was another great success and those who were not dressed up lined the streets to show their support.

The weather did not look too good for the day but just before the floats started to line up the sun came out and it turned out lovely.



The dance at night was brilliant with entertainment from live band 'Catch 23' and a Karaoke disco.

The Committee would like to thank everybody who helped before, during and after the day - their help is very much appreciated!

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