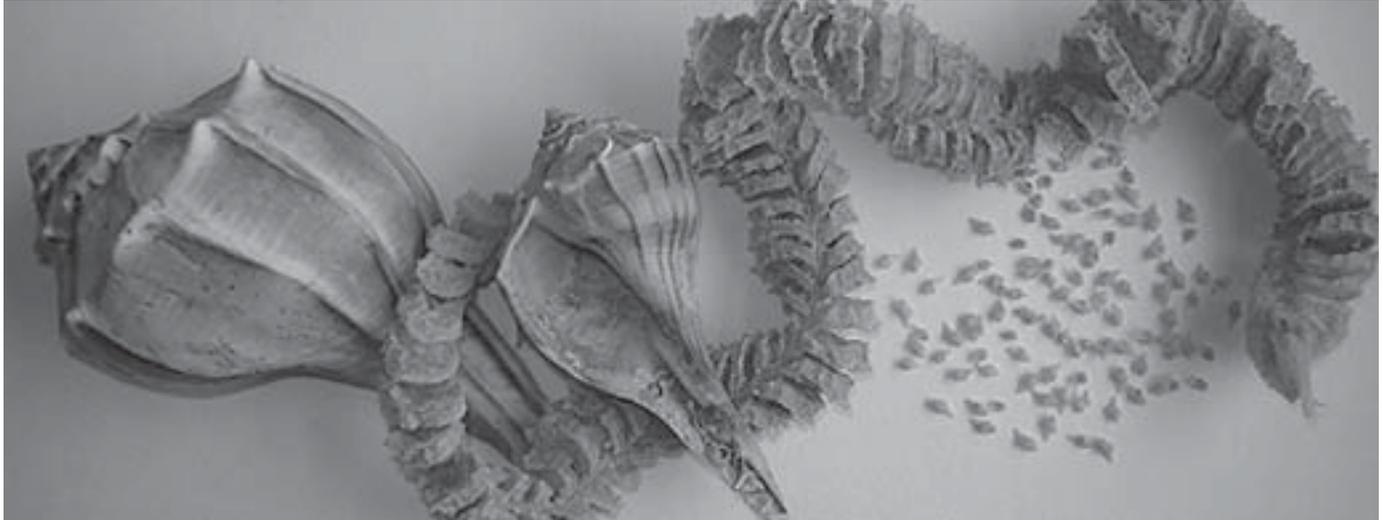




## Seashells



Stages of the Lightning Whelk

### Shell Collecting at the National Seashore

Padre Island National Seashore allows visitors to take up to five gallons of seashells, as long as they are not used commercially. Shell collecting is permitted as long as the mollusk in the shell is no longer living. Check carefully to make sure that the shell is empty or the organism has died before you collect.

### Successful Shell Hunting

Successful shell hunting on the national seashore is a combination of two factors: distance from the Malaquite Visitor Center, and timing. Since shell hunters come immediately to the beaches near the visitor center, the closer to the center- the fewer shells. Successful shelling will therefore entail either considerable walking or driving. If you have a four-

wheel-drive vehicle, try going south from the visitor center. Often the area between the 20 and 50 mile markers is good for shelling. Currents carry shells from nearby reefs and deposit them there. If you do not have a four-wheel-drive vehicle, walk as deep into the Closed Beach area as you can. Fewer people go there, and your chances might be slightly better.

### Tides and Timing

Timing is also important in shell hunting. The best time to go out for seashells is after a major storm, when unusually high tides may have washed in an abundance of shells. Winter is also an excellent time of year for shelling. Cold fronts can lower the water temperature down into the 40's and kill temperature-sensitive marine life. Winter may also bring unusually high or low tides. Shelling can be excellent during an extremely low tide.

Many people do not realize that shells are part of a living animal and have interesting life cycles. For

example, the state shell of Texas, the Texas Lightning whelk, *Busycon perversum pulleyi*, is a carnivorous animal that feeds primarily on mollusks such as clams. The female whelk constructs a long string of hardened spiky, disk-shaped capsules using her black foot and mucus secretions. The egg sack is attached to the ocean floor where the eggs will slowly develop their own shell and emerge as a small snail-like animal. The egg sacks will occasionally wash ashore and many beachcombers mistake the string of capsules for the skin shed by a snake.

### Shell Uses

Throughout human history, shells have had a wide variety of uses. Shells were once used as tools, various forms of adornment, in art, and as a form of currency. American Indians used a string of cylindrical shell beads that were white and purple in color. This form of shell money was called wampum. The purple beads

on the string were worth more and the shell beads were made mainly from one common clam called guahog, *Mercenaria mercenaria*. Along the Texas Coast, the abundance of oystershell middens, or shell mounds, illustrates the importance of oysters and mollusks in the diet of the Karankawa who lived in the area.



a. Quahog b. bay scallop c. atlantic cockle d. disc dosinia e. incongruous ark f. scotch bonnet g. sanddollar h. angel wing i. spiny jewel box j. moon snail k. baby's ear l. atlantic winged oyster m. heart urchin n. saw toothed pen shell o. lettered olive p. sundial q. turkey wing r. eastern murex r. Florida fighting conch s. lightning whelk