



Shell and Tell



The Newsletter of the Gulf Coast Shell Club

WHAT'S INSIDE

PROGRAMS
& EVENTS
PAGE 2

COA 2026
PAGE 3 & 4

COA 2026
PAGE 5

GASTROPOD
VS. BIVALVE
PAGE 6 & 7

COA 2026

A NEWCOMER'S EXPERIENCE



First Day: I showed up early, and overly eager to get to the registration table, but despite my attitude towards promptness, I made myself hang back so no one would witness my nerdy enthusiasm. I wanted to be cool as a conch, but embarrassment set in when a man's voice called out to me, "If you're looking for registration, you're going the wrong way." I looked up, feeling betrayed by the random blonde hotel guest I had been following, who had led me astray. I turned around to join my new tour guide. "I guess I just decided to follow a complete stranger," I replied. Jeff laughed, and just like that, I made my very first COA friend. Despite the exciting field trip adventures, the fact-filled presentations, the abundance of shells you could win daily, this.... The newly formed, and the first of many friendships is what made this experience amazing. Maybe one day I'll come up with the perfect poetic words to describe that incredible feeling of being surrounded by like-minded, shell-passionate people, but for now, I'll just say I found my tribe.



- Club Meeting
July 14th.
- GCSC Annual Shell Show
July 18 & 19th.
- Club Meeting Guest
Speaker August 11th.

CLUB OFFICERS:

President - Dave Clausen
Vice President - Leanne Shell
Secretary - Angela Cummings
Correspondence - DJ Moore
Treasurer - Jen Goettsch
Tides - Don Kotval
Membership - Kathy O'Brien
Librarian - Kathy Dilbeck

PROGRAMS AND REFRESHMENTS



"Ways to expand your mind and waistline simultaneously!"

Month	Program	Refreshments
July	Shell Show Review	Self
August	Dr. Ashley Oliphant	Ernie Bernard
September	Shell Club Facebook Familiarization	Gerry Lowther

EVENTS

CLUB MEETING

July 14th @7PM. Bay County Library - 898 W. 11th Street. Panama City, FL.
This meeting is mainly to review shell show preparations and details.

OUR 27TH ANNUAL SHELL SHOW!

Saturday, July 18th & July 19th.

FSU Holley Center. 4750 Collegiate Dr. Panama City, FL 32404

Setup will be on Friday, July 17th.

REGULAR CLUB MEETING

August 11th (needs confirmation - check website for updates). Special guest speaker Dr. Ashley Oliphant.

* All times posted are Central Standard Time unless otherwise noted.



COA 2026 Bradenton, Florida



Congratulations to
Jim & Linda Brunner
for earning the
COA
Lifetime Achievement
Award!







GASTROPOD VS. BIVALVE

By: Jim Brunner

Blame this one on Brant Holman. During the shell show he posed the following question: In a head to head battle between gastropods and bivalves which would prevail?

A seemingly simple question but one with many roads that can be followed to find an answer.

One way is to look at history -- and with shells we have 550,000,000 years worth to look at. During that time vast numbers of gastropods and bivalve species evolved only to later die out. The reasons are many and varied. Most notable would be the several global extinction events that wiped out large percentages of all living species. But we should include more subtle reasons such as Ice Ages which favor cold water species over tropical ones and their opposites: high temperatures and increased acidification of salt water and the problems that creates.

Another road: My wife used to teach her students about foxes and hares as an example of how nature keeps things in balance. In a year where there is an abundance of food the hare population explodes, allowing the foxes plenty of prey and fueling a reproductive spurt on their part. Unfortunately, this causes number of available hares to drop radically, causing a famine and dieoff for the foxes. This boom and bust cycle continues to repeat itself over the years but it never reaches the point of an extinction event for either species.

But let's look underwater. Gastropods are mobile and can move about in search of food. Bivalves, with a few exceptions (such as Pectinidae (Scallops) and Veneridae (Venus Clams)) are immobile and live their entire life in one spot. Based on that it would seem that the gastropods have been dealt all the good cards and the clams don't stand a chance. Yet a bivalve species is almost never driven to extinction by its predators. So, what's going on?

The answer is reproductive rates. The bivalves spawn in numbers that dwarf those of the gastropods. A single Eastern Oyster (*Cassostrea virginica*) in the St Andrews Bay system can produce 100 million eggs during a single reproductive cycle -- and there are hundreds of thousands of them in these waters. By contrast the Giant Eastern Murex (*Hexaplex fulvescens*), one of the oysters predators, will produce between 18,000 to 50,000 eggs per cycle but most of those will serve as nurse eggs (food for the earliest hatchers) or will not make it to maturity. Larval hatchings range from 700-2000 per female per year and the vast majority will fall prey to their own predators before becoming large enough to take on an oyster. To be honest, the same restrictions on reaching maturity can be said for the oysters, but the sheer size of the disparity in initial numbers means that no matter how many the predators eat, there will always be huge numbers that are untouched.

So, what's the answer to our question? It's a draw. Our first road: "vast time periods" doesn't really apply because we are looking at a small time period. The second: "Foxes and hares" doesn't work because we don't have significant boom and bust cycles among gastropods, although climate change and man's polluting tendencies may alter that. So, the most reasonable answer is the third option where everybody's happy (unless you are an oyster with a murex on your back).

Perhaps the better question might be who wins in mollusk vs. man -- but I think we know the answer to that one.

But you know Brant -- one question is never enough. The next question arose because I had entered a display on the family Tridacnidae. "Which" he queried "is the largest of all the bivalves?" You would think this would have a very simple answer, but alas, not so.

If we go by weight alone there is no question that *Tridacna gigas* is the clear winner. I have seen numbers tossed around with hefts of 500-600 pounds, easily making it the heaviest among bivalves (and among all the mollusks) as far as to weight.

But is it the biggest shell? If we don't go by weight but by size (i.e. length), is there room for argument. The *Tridacna gigas* record comes in at close to five feet, making it seem like a no-brainer to award it the crown, but if you're going to focus on shell-built length there is another contestant we have to consider. You probably have never heard of the genus *Kuphus* ((Coo-Fuss) even though it's a very cool name)). It's a bivalve that spends its life buried in mud in a burrow of its own creation. To protect the animal it creates a tube of rigid material (probably calcium carbonate) which gets longer as the animal grows. In the early 1990's a shell dealer introduced *Kuphus polythalamius* (Linne, 1767) at the COA Convention and they were huge, the tallest coming in at around six feet. Yet the whole structure starts with a clam that is less than two inches long -- but that clam built the entire tube.

So, once again the decision as to the winner of this "biggest" question is up to you: *Tridacna gigas* or *Kuphus polythalamius*.



AI-generated illustration of a Tridacna gigas.