

## Shells from the Linnean Collection

High resolution images are available from Claire Inman, [claire@linnean.org](mailto:claire@linnean.org)

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The giant clam (*Tridacna gigas* L.) is the largest mollusc on Earth, capable of reaching 4 feet (1.2 meters) in length, weighing more than 500 pounds (227 kg) and surviving for 100 years or more. Giant clams achieve their enormous proportions by consuming the sugars and proteins produced by the billions of algae that live in their tissues. In exchange, they offer the algae a safe home and regular access to sunlight for photosynthesis, basking by day below the water's surface with their fluted shells open and their colourful mantles exposed. The adductor muscle of *Tridacna* is considered a delicacy, and overharvesting of the species for food, shells, and the aquarium trade have led the IUCN to list the giant clams as "vulnerable".



The purple dye murex (*Murex brandaris* L.), like others in the family Muricidae can produce a secretion from the hypobranchial gland which is colourless when fresh but which turns into a powerful and lasting dye when exposed to the air. In nature the snails use the secretion as part of their predatory behaviour and as an antimicrobial lining on egg masses but *brandaris* was the species used by the ancients to produce "Tyrian", "Royal" or "Imperial" purple from as early as the Minoan civilisation and its use by the emperors of the Eastern Roman Empire continued until its final collapse in 1453.



The European wing oyster (*Mytilus hirundo* L.) develops attached to rocks covered in sand or mud, as well as to other animals such as gorgonians. In life the outer side of the shell is seldom visible because of the many invertebrates that grow on it, including hydroids, bryozoans and sea-squirts.