Ø=Ü ShellingShelling

Southwest Florida Seashell Checklist

ETHICAL BEACHCOMBING & FIELD IDENTIFICATION • SHELLINGSHELLING.COM

24 Common & Prized Shells of Sanibel, Captiva & Gulf Shores

FLORIDA WILDLIFE LAW & ETHICAL SHELLING NOTICE (Lee County Ord. 89-08 / 04-20 & F.A.C. Rule 68B-26.004):
Live shelling is strictly prohibited. Always inspect the aperture, siphonal canal, and underside for living occupants or hermit crabs. If any living creature is found, return it immediately and gently to the water. Only collect 100% empty, sun-bleached shells.

☐ 

Junonia

Scaphella junonia • Holy Grail

Notice the slender, spindle-shaped shell with geometric rows of square chocolate dots on a high spire. Do not confuse with the Scotch Bonnet, which is rounded and…

Date: _____ Beach: _____

☐ 

Lightning Whelk

Sinistrofulgur perversum • Common species / Prized trophy (large)

THE DEFINITIVE TEST: Hold the shell apex pointing UP. If the aperture opening is on your LEFT hand side, you have found a true Lightning Whelk! Knobbed whelks open on th…

Date: _____ Beach: _____

☐ 

Scotch Bonnet

Semicassis granulata • Rare Trophy

Unlike the slender Junonia, the Scotch Bonnet has a globose (rounded) helmet shape, a thick outer lip with small ridges, and amber-gold square checks.

Date: _____ Beach: _____

☐ 

Florida Fighting Conch

Strombus alatus • Abundant

Notice the flared outer lip with a bright orange or purple glaze inside the aperture, accompanied by short shoulder spines along the body spire.

Date: _____ Beach: _____

☐ 

Lion's Paw Scallop

Nodipecten nodosus • Holy Grail

Look for massive raised bulbous knobs (nodes) along roughly 8–10 heavy ribs, bathed in deep brick-red, burnt orange, or rich crimson colors.

Date: _____ Beach: _____

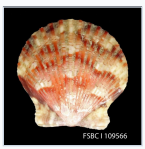
☐ 

Angel Wing

Cyrtopleura costata • Prized Find

Extremely brittle porcelain white shell. Finding both valves intact together is an extraordinary beachcomber triumph.

Date: _____ Beach: _____

☐ 

Calico Scallop

Argopecten gibbus • Common

Distinguished by roughly 20 radiating rounded ribs with symmetrical wing-like 'ears' (auricles) at the hinge.

Date: _____ Beach: _____

☐ 

Keyhole Sand Dollar

Mellita tenuis • Uncommon

Bleached chalk-white specimens are dead tests safe to collect. If it is dark green, purple, or covered in soft velvet spines, it is alive and must stay in the water.

Date: _____ Beach: _____

☐ 

Lettered Olive

Oliva sayana • Uncommon

Look for small V-shaped mounds in wet sand as receding waves draw back. The natural porcelain finish requires no artificial polish.

Date: _____ Beach: _____

☐ 

Knobbed Whelk

Busycon carica • Uncommon

Hold apex UP: aperture opens to the RIGHT. Notice the row of sharp triangular horns/knobs around the body shoulder.

Date: _____ Beach: _____

☐ 

Banded Tulip

Cinctura hunteria • Uncommon

Notice the widely spaced, sharp continuous dark parallel lines. The True Tulip has more crowded, broken lines.

Date: _____ Beach: _____

☐ 

Alphabet Cone

Conus spurius • Prized Find

Flat, almost level spire top with sharp shoulder angles tapering down to a narrow base.

Date: _____ Beach: _____

Ø<ß Field Shelling & Tide Guide — Southwest Florida Barrier Beaches

Ø<ß Low Tide Windows

Target 1 hour before to 1 hour after lowest water. Winter negative low tides (MLLW) expose sandbars at Blind Pass, Bowman's Beach, and Lighthouse Point with pristine shell beds.

Ø=Ü¨ Wind & Storm Dynamics

Sustained northwest winds following winter cold fronts generate powerful onshore swells, lifting offshore benthic species (Junonia, Scotch Bonnet, Lion's Paw) and depositing them in the surf wrack.

Ø=Þáþ Florida Wildlife Rules

Sanibel & Lee County strictly ban harvesting live mollusks or sand dollars. Always inspect apertures and return live specimens gently to knee-deep water. Ding Darling NWR bans all collecting.

Ø<ß' Recommended Beachcomber Gear: Mesh shelling bag (allows sand/water escape) • Polarized sunglasses • Hard-soled water shoes • 10x hand loupe for wentletraps

☐ 

Florida Crown Conch

Melongena corona • Common Find

Look for one or more rows of sharp, curved spines on the shoulder, often with a second row near the base. The aperture is wide and pale, without the glossy orange of a…

Date: _____ Beach: _____

☐ 

Shark Eye

Neverita duplicata • Common Find

Look down on the spire: the whorls form a spiral 'eye' that is often bluish-grey. The shell is smooth, broad and globe-shaped, and a large brown callus partly covers the navel…

Date: _____ Beach: _____

☐ 

Florida Horse Conch

Triplofusus giganteus • Prized Find

Look for a tall spindle shape with rounded knobs on each whorl, raised spiral cords, and a long siphonal canal. Juveniles are vivid orange. Tulips are smaller and smoothe…

Date: _____ Beach: _____

☐ 

True Tulip

Fasciolaria tulipa • Prized Find

Compare the spiral lines: a True Tulip has many closely spaced, often broken lines, while a Banded Tulip has a few widely spaced, unbroken dark bands. True Tulips also grow…

Date: _____ Beach: _____

☐ 

Pear Whelk

Fulguropsis spirata • Prized Find

Hold it spire up: the aperture is on the RIGHT. Look for a groove (channel) running along the suture between whorls and smooth, rounded shoulders without knobs.

Date: _____ Beach: _____

☐ 

Angulate Wentletrap

Epitonium angulatum • Prized Find

Look for a tall, pointed white spire with sharp vertical ribs that line up from whorl to whorl, and a round aperture with a thickened lip. Use a hand lens: most are under an inch long.

Date: _____ Beach: _____

☐ 

Coquina Clam

Donax variabilis • Common Find

Look for a small, glossy, wedge-shaped valve with one end longer than the other, often with color rays spreading from the hinge. The inner edge is finely toothed.

Date: _____ Beach: _____

☐ 

Atlantic Giant Cockle

Dinocardium robustum • Common Find

Look for a deep, inflated, heart-shaped valve with many evenly spaced radial ribs and a scalloped edge. Unlike scallops, it has no ear-like wings at the hinge.

Date: _____ Beach: _____

☐ 

Kitten's Paw

Plicatula gibbosa • Common Find

Count the ribs: there are only about 5 – 7 big, rounded folds ending in a strongly scalloped edge. It's much smaller than a Lion's Paw and has no ear-like wings at the hinge.

Date: _____ Beach: _____

☐ 

Turkey Wing

Arca zebra • Common Find

Look for an elongated, boxy shell with a long straight hinge lined with small comb-like teeth and reddish-brown zigzag stripes. Fine ribs run across the surface.

Date: _____ Beach: _____

☐ 

Common Jingle Shell

Anomia simplex • Common Find

Look for a thin, glossy, irregular oval valve with a pearly sheen. The flat lower valve has a hole near the hinge; the domed upper valve doesn't. Black ones were stained by…

Date: _____ Beach: _____

☐ 

Sunray Venus

Macrocallista nimbosa • Prized Find

Look for an elongated, smooth, very glossy oval valve with broad lavender-pink or brown rays crossing fainter bands. It is much larger and longer than a coquina and smooth rath…

Date: _____ Beach: _____

SCAN FOR FIELD GUIDE

shellingshelling.com

Ø=Üñ Scan for Mobile Field Companion & Live NOAA Tides

Point your smartphone camera at this QR code to access high-resolution diagnostic anatomy photographs, live NOAA Station 8725383 tide predictions, lookalike comparison keys, and our 3-step visual identification key on your mobile device.

Authoritative Verification & Photo Attribution:

Taxonomic names verified against the World Register of Marine Species (WoRMS). Research grounded in Bailey-Matthews National Shell Museum and Florida Museum of Natural History publications. Specimen photographs licensed via Wikimedia Commons (CC BY / CC BY-SA).

Ø=ÜÝ Field Beachcombing Notes & Journal

Trip Date: _____ Location / Beach: _____ Tide Level: _____

Special Finds / Weather Notes:

_____

_____

_____