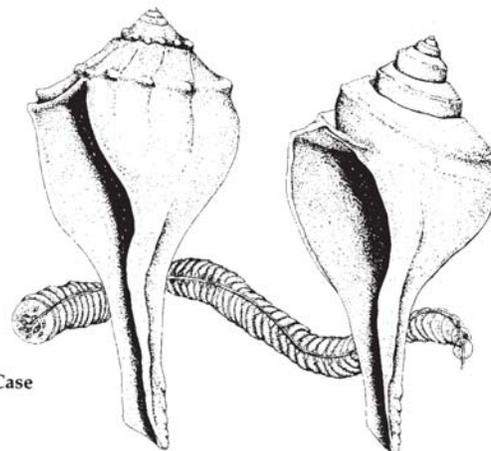


This Month

# WHELKS



Egg Case

Channeled Whelk

Knobbed Whelk

**Colloquial Nicknames:**

Channeled Whelk

Knobbed Whelk

**Scientific names:**

*Busycon canaliculatum*

*Busycon carica*

**Field Markings:** The shell of both species is yellow-red or orange inside and pale gray outside.

**Size:** Channeled whelk grows up to 8 inches long; knobbed whelk grows up to 9 inches long and 4.5 inches wide

**Habitat:** Sandy or muddy bottoms

**Seasonal Appearance:** Year-round

open with their strong muscular foot. As soon as the valves open, even the tiniest amount, the whelk wedges in the sharp edge of its shell, inserts the proboscis and devours the soft body of the clam.

Mating occurs by way of internal fertilization; sexes are separate. The egg casing of the whelk is a long strand of yellowish, parchment-like disks, resembling a necklace - its unique shape is sculpted by the whelk's foot. Egg cases can be two to three feet long and have 70 to 100 capsules, each of which can hold 20 to 100 eggs. Newly hatched channeled whelks escape from small holes at the top of each egg case with their shells already on. Egg cases are sometimes found along the Bay shoreline, washed up with the high tide debris.

## DISTINGUISHING FEATURES AND BEHAVIORS

Whelks are large snails with massive shells. The two most common species in Narragansett Bay are the knobbed whelk and the channeled whelk.

The **knobbed whelk** is the largest marine snail in the Bay. It is pear-shaped with a flared outer lip and knobs on the shoulder of its shell. The **channeled whelk** is generally smaller and has spiral lines instead of knobs deeply channeled on its shell.

Both species of whelk have an operculum - a hard, brownish-black, shell-like organ used to close the opening of the shell for protection. The feeding organ is called the proboscis, which includes the mouth, esophagus and radula. Whelks use the radula, a drill-like organ with small teeth, for grasping either flesh or plants. Whelks also have a long, tubular siphon, which they use to draw in oxygenated water.

Both whelk species are aggressive predators, preying on other invertebrates, particularly clams. They feed by prying a gap between the two valves of the clam and forcing the shell

## Relationship to People

Both channeled and knobbed whelks scavenge and hunt for food and are often found in crab traps and lobster pots, presumably stealing the bait.

Whelks are a favored food in the Northeast and are harvested all along the Atlantic coast. Scungili, a popular Italian dish, is made from the foot of both species of whelk.

## HOW TO GET YOUR OWN COPY

RISAA members can purchase their own copy of *The Uncommon Guide To Common Life on Narragansett Bay* for \$15 from the RISAA Merchandise Committee. Stop by the committee table at any monthly RISAA meeting.



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