

Shelling while looking for a comfortable deck chair to sit on

Article and photos by George Holm

Going away on collecting trips for me this summer was not in the cards, and except for a couple of day trips to Vancouver Island, where I joined up with Rick Harbo and Bill Merilees, my days were spent close to home going on walks with my dog Zoe. Walks with her during the past seven years have yielded me numerous first time mollusc discoveries and observations and this year was to prove no different.

I live in the Port Royal area of Queensborough, a small land area at the eastern tip of Lulu Island, that belongs to the city of New Westminster, BC, and is surrounded on three sides by the Fraser River. The remainder of the island is the city of Richmond.

I walk Zoe three times a day, usually around the neighborhood. Morning walks are before breakfast, rain or shine, and consist of walking around the River Walk, a paved pedestrian path around the development that follows the river. It is on that early walk that I watch for the time each spring when the colorful Banded Garden Snail, *Cepaea nemoralis* (Linnaeus, 1758) emerges from winter hibernation, an event I have written about previously in *The Dredgings*. Also during those early walks I look for any mollusc that may not have been able to hide again before daylight, and those I place back among the bushes at the side of the path to keep them from being stepped on.

This year our afternoon routine changed from walking in the neighborhood to spending time at a boardwalk park directly across the river from where we walk in the morning. There I could watch the boat traffic from the comfort of a nice deck chair, and Zoe got to sniff for pigeons that nest underneath the boardwalk through cracks between the planks. This change in our routine was made possible when the city added a daily foot passenger ferry service in May. A twelve passenger ferry crosses the river from a dock five minutes walk from my home, and in five minutes would deliver us to the New Westminster Quay, on the opposite shore, and from there it was just a short walk to the park. An extra boat is added on weekends and holidays. A trial ferry service last year operated only on weekends so the daily service this year was a most welcome change.

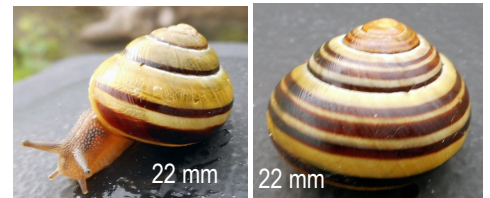
It was on June 13th, that I literally stepped on my newest shell find. I was focusing on where Zoe was sniffing and not watching where I was walking when I felt a crunch under my shoe. When I lifted my foot I saw that I had just stepped on what had been a live Winged Floater, *Anodonta nuttalliana* I. Lea, 1838 [1], a species I had not found before.

To find a clam that has been dropped on shore by a bird is not unusual, but to find a new species and then to step on it, was most disappointing and unfortunate. However, if one clam was there then there may be others and the following day I made a careful search along the entire boardwalk and I did find one additional clam. That one was a Western Floater, *Anodonta kennerlyi* I. Lea, 1860 [2], fresh dead and with some muscle tissue still attached, and the shell was chipped where a bird, probably a crow, had opened it. I had found that species twice before on the opposite shore and both of those clams had been dropped there by birds.

The river at New Westminster is influenced by tidal fluctuation, and I found the first clams when a sand bar that is close to shore first became exposed in daytime by spring low tides. Gulls and crows both frequent the sandbar looking for food, but it is only the crows that come onto land.

Looking for clams became a daily activity for me and over the next month I found two more, one of each species. The irony here is that the *A. kennerlyi* I found had also been live and complete when a bird abandoned it and it too had been stepped on and crushed by a pedestrian, the same as I had done to the *A. nuttalliana*.

Finding the two species of clams on the boardwalk was totally unexpected, and what fun it was, when all I went looking for was a comfortable deck chair to sit on.



Cepaea nemoralis



The Q to Q ferry
[Queensborough to Quay]

