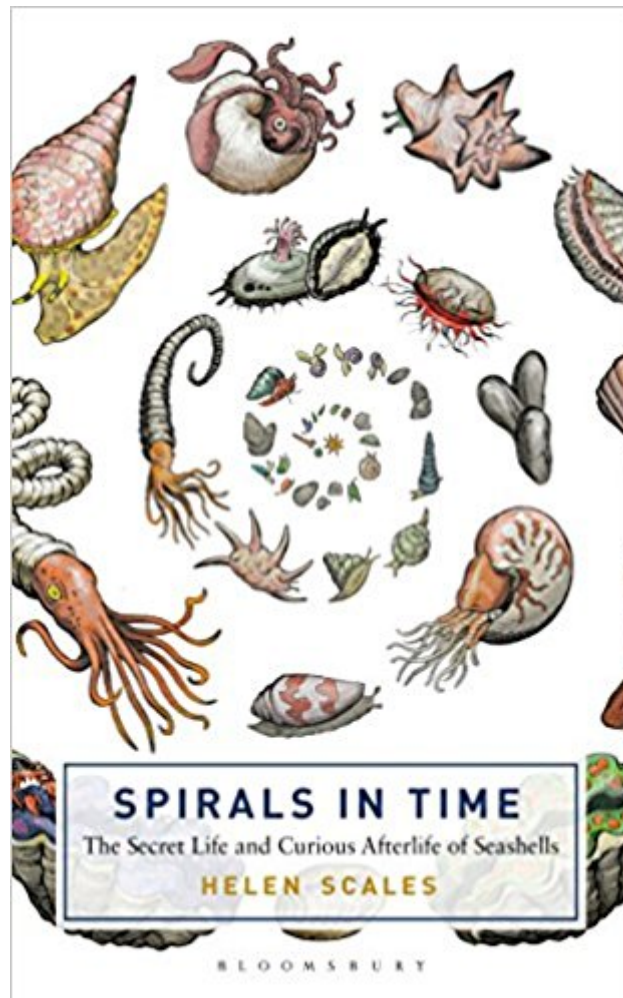


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# Spirals In Time: The Secret Life And Curious Afterlife Of Seashells



## Synopsis

Seashells are the sculpted homes of a remarkable group of animals: the molluscs. These are some of the most ancient and successful animals on the planet. But watch out. Some molluscs can kill you if you eat them. Some will kill you if you stand too close. That hasn't stopped people using shells in many ways over thousands of years. They became the first jewelry and oldest currencies; they've been used as potent symbols of sex and death, prestige and war, not to mention a nutritious (and tasty) source of food. *Spirals in Time* is an exuberant aquatic romp, revealing amazing tales of these undersea marvels. Helen Scales leads us on a journey into their realm, as she goes in search of everything from snails that 'fly' underwater on tiny wings to octopuses accused of stealing shells and giant mussels with golden beards that were supposedly the source of Jason's golden fleece, and learns how shells have been exchanged for human lives, tapped for mind-bending drugs and inspired advances in medical technology. Weaving through these stories are the remarkable animals that build them, creatures with fascinating tales to tell, a myriad of spiralling shells following just a few simple rules of mathematics and evolution. Shells are also bellwethers of our impact on the natural world. Some species have been overfished, others poisoned by polluted seas; perhaps most worryingly of all, molluscs are expected to fall victim to ocean acidification, a side-effect of climate change that may soon cause shells to simply melt away. But rather than dwelling on what we risk losing, *Spirals in Time* urges you to ponder how seashells can reconnect us with nature, and heal the rift between ourselves and the living world.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

If you know anything about hermit crabs you probably know that they live in empty snail shells that they wear to protect their tender parts, and you may know that eventually they outgrow the shell that they are living in and have to look for a bigger one. If a hermit crab who is looking for a new home finds an empty shell, explores it and finds that it is too big, he does not just sigh and head on down the line, he sits down and waits. Other hermit crabs will take notice of the situation, come over and have a look at the empty shell, and all interested crabs will then form a line in size order, biggest nearest the empty shell. Eventually a hermit crab will come along, find that the empty shell is a perfect fit, abandon the shell he came in, and move in. The first crab in line will move into the shell he just abandoned, the next crab will move into the shell that one leaves behind, and so-on down the line. Every crab in line gets a perfectly-fitting new home. This is the first thing I learned when I opened *Spirals in Time* at random and read a page or two, to see if it was a book I would be interested in reading. If you are looking for a typical seashell book, filled with masterful color photographs of intricately-patterned shells, this is most definitely not the book for you. If you are enough of a naturalist to be interested in learning that the intricate shell patterns may have served as a memory-aide to the shell maker, helping him construct his shell in good order, or in learning that the rasping teeth of the limpet are made of an iron compound that is the hardest biological material known, or in finding out that the marine snail called the giant triton eats tire-sized, poisonous, coral-reef-destroying crown of thorns starfish, then you will probably enjoy reading *Spirals in Time*. Author Helen Scales says just enough about each of the many topics in the book to spark curiosity, and if you have as much curiosity as I do you will find yourself checking google to learn more, and to look at pictures of the pretty shells. But, with so many topics covered, the reader may find interest waxing and waning “I, for instance, was intrigued when learning about some of the details of what is known or suspected about the evolution of mollusks (spell check insists on ‘mollusk’ while google seems to be just as set on ‘mollusc’) but found myself much less interested in the details of commercial shellfish farming.

This book is full of fascinating facts, enough to make you want to go to the beach right now. But it is also a bad-news bringer, with the grim discussion about the probable future of the shelled creatures that may or may not survive or adapt to higher ocean acidity.

As all great books it talks about the 500 million years of development and makes it seem real. It is a story about evolution and how millions of years of experimentation creates way more than you could expect from a mollusk.

An entertaining and enlightening look at our mollusk friends. I will never look at a clam the same way again.

Excellent! Must read if you have any curiosity or attraction to sea shells.

Brilliant. Studied. Perfectly written.

Good book, but I expected more pictures.

*Spirals in Time: The Secret Life and Curious Afterlife of Seashells* by Helen Scales is a very highly recommended, fascinating nonfiction book about conchology, and, honestly, who doesn't appreciate seashells? (Just a quick glance through my home makes it clearly evident that I do.) "Members of the phylum Mollusca are among the most ancient animals on the planet. Their shells provide homes for other animals, and across the ages, people have used shells not only as trinkets but also as a form of money, and as powerful symbols of sex and death, prestige and war." *Spirals in Time* is not only interesting and entertaining, it is also a thoroughly engaging look at the history, biology and the scientists (and mathematicians) who study seashells, primarily mollusks. The information is presented through stories and personal experience. As author Helen Scales writes in her introduction: "This book is made up of my choice of shell stories, ones that together paint a picture of a remarkable company of animals along with some of the more offbeat, forgotten and little-known tales of how those shells have made their way into the human world." Scales is a wonderful storyteller. Her sound science and knowledge of the subject matter combined with the ability to present the information in an entertaining and engaging manner made *Spirals in Time* an utterly delightful and accessible book. She has some great stories to tell that just happen to pass along a bountiful amount of information. Disclosure: My Kindle edition was courtesy of Bloomsbury USA for review.

purposes.

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