

Photo courtesy of Paul Kay



The Dogwhelk feeding on barnacles.

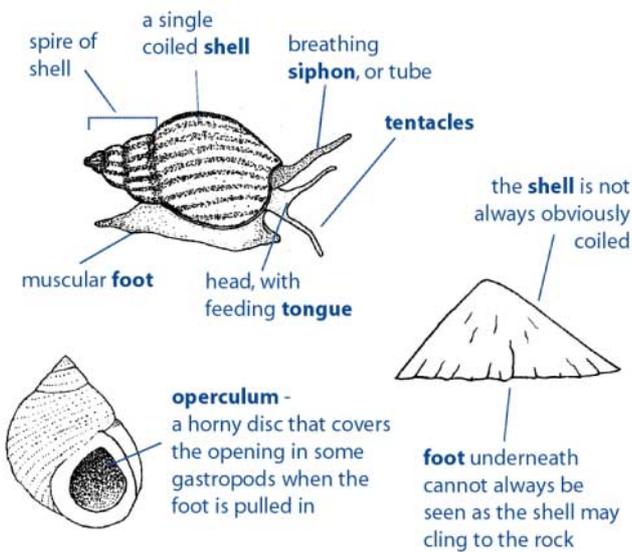
Sea Snails

On the seashore you'll find many animals that live in **shells**. Known as molluscs, these animals have a soft body which is protected by the hard shell. Some animals have two shells but many only have a single shell and it is these that are known as the sea snail (or gastropods). Sea snails often, but not always, have a shell that is coiled into a spiral.

The shell of a sea snail has a single opening through which the muscular **foot** comes out. This foot is very useful. It may be used as a suction disc to prevent the animal being washed off the rocks, or as a spade for burrowing into sand or mud. It is more likely, however, that when you find a sea snail the foot will have been pulled inside the shell and, in many cases, the hole will be covered with a horny disc. This disc is called the **operculum**; it stops the animal drying out when out of water and also gives it protection.

When the tide is out, most sea snails hide away under rocks and seaweed or bury themselves in the sand and mud. When the tide comes back, in they start searching for food. Many of the sea snails found on the shore are herbivores, which eat plants only. They strip tiny seaweeds off the rock with a **tongue** that is covered in teeth. Others are active predators feeding on worms, barnacles and other animals. Some are even able to drill through the shells of other molluscs to get at the flesh inside.

Some typical gastropods or sea snails



Illustrations courtesy of "A Beginner's Guide to Ireland's Seashore"

Examples of sea snails that are found on the seashore:



Flat Periwinkle



Limpet



Edible Periwinkle



Topshell



Blue-rayed limpet

Photo courtesy of Paul Kay

Land snails

Land snails are also gastropod molluscs. Just like their cousins in the sea, they have a soft body, which is protected by a hard shell. They can be found in all parts of the world, where there is vegetation. They glide along on their foot, producing a slime as they do so. This slime eventually hardens and sometimes you see these glistening trails on the ground or on a flower pot – evidence that a snail has been around!

Snails in the garden can be a real pest. They love fresh new growth and often eat small plants before the garden has time to blink!



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