

Identifying the egg masses of some of our intertidal snails

by Linda Schroeder, Rick Harbo and Susanne Jeffrey

Identification of snail eggs can be a challenging process. Some snails lay eggs or egg masses which are easily found and recognizable, more so because those snails tend to remain by their eggs and tend them. Other snails may lay their eggs and then leave the immediate area (or fall victim to predators), which can make it very difficult to be sure which species laid them or if they are even mollusk eggs. Identification may also be stymied by the presence of a different species who is present but is there to eat the eggs and not lay them. A few groups keep their eggs hidden beneath their shells. Still others are broadcast-spawners who simply release their gametes to the whims of the water currents just as bivalves do. It can take dedicated monitoring to watch for that time of year when a particular species is laying their eggs and catch them in the process.



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The eggs of *Nucella lamellosa*, Frilled dogwinkle, are some of the most commonly seen eggs on PNW beaches. The eggs may completely cover large boulders and the snails are usually present. Narrow, somewhat pointed egg cases about 10 mm long.



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The *Nucella ostrina*, Northern striped dogwinkle, egg cases are shorter at about 6 mm in length with a blunt top. They'll also be found higher in the intertidal and are usually in far smaller clusters than the *N. lamellosa*. The snails are usually present.



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Nucella canaliculata, Channeled dogwinkle, creates egg cases that are similar to *N. lamellosa* except that they have a dark line down one side of the capsule. The snails are usually present.



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Ceratostoma foliatum, Leafy Hornmouth, has flattened egg cases of about 13 mm long. They may be slightly curled. The snails may or may not be present.

The egg cases of *Ocenebrellus inornatus*, Japanese oyster drill, are similar to that of the Leafy hornmouth but reach 15-20 mm long. The top of each case has a somewhat pointed tip. The snails are usually present.



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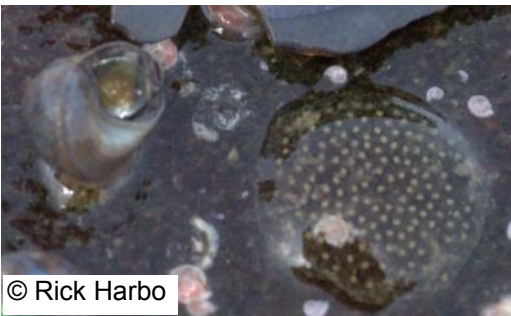
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Lirabuccinum dirum, Dire Whelk, lays rounded egg capsules in a row. The capsules are about 5 mm in diameter. The snail may be present.



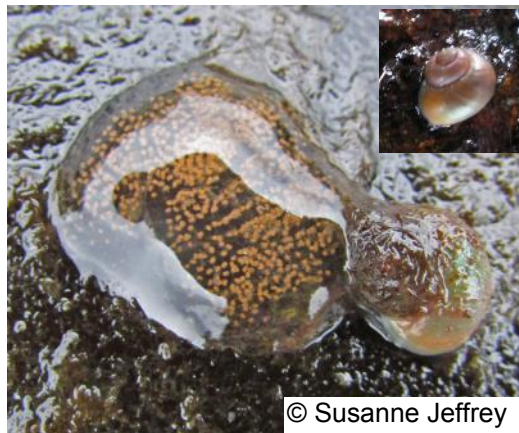
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This is an introduced species - *Tritia obsoleta*, Black Dog Whelk. It is not widespread in the PNW but has interesting egg capsules. They have a layered look with almost fluted edges and are under 1 cm across. The snails will likely be nearby.



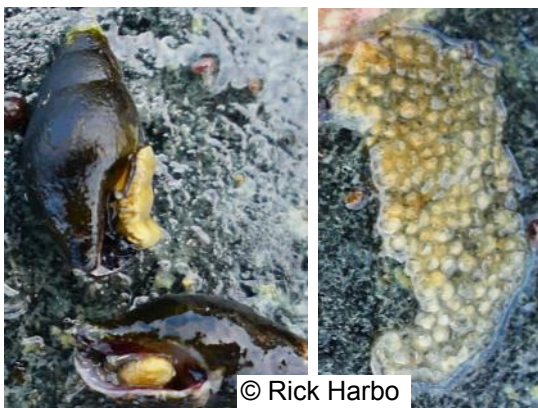
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Lirularia succincta, the Tucked Topsnail, lays its eggs within a gelatinous mass. Often they are found under dead shells or similar hiding place. The masses average no more than 5 mm across.



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← Another species laying its eggs in a gelatinous mass is this *Margarites*. The eggs are orangish-yellow and the mass is about 1 cm across. We have been calling this *Margarites helicinus*, but the ones ranging along the west coast to SE Alaska are now being called *Margarites olivaceous marginatus*.



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The small egg capsules of *Alia carinata*, Carinate Dove-snail, are massed together. The individual capsules are barely 1mm in diameter.



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The Northern White Slipper-snail, *Crepidula nummaria*, is one that shelters its eggs under its shell. The yellow eggs are in small gelatinous masses grouped under the shell. Only by lifting the shell can you see the eggs.