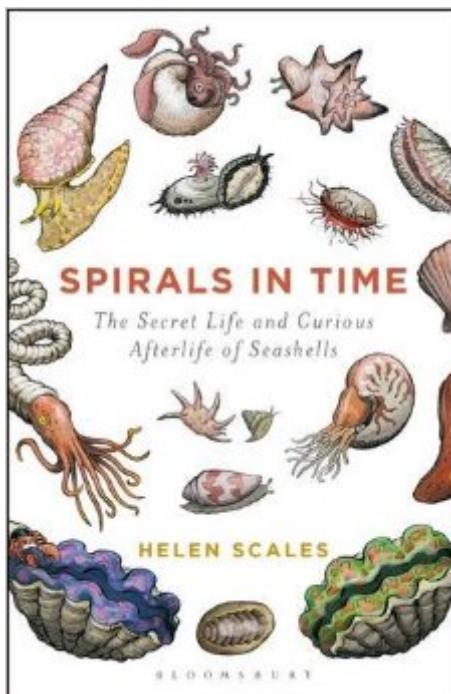


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Spirals In Time: The Secret Life And Curious Afterlife Of Seashells



Synopsis

Seashells, stretching from the deep past into the present day, are touchstones leading into fascinating realms of the natural world and cutting-edge science. Members of the phylum Mollusca are among the most ancient animals on the planet. Their shells provide homes for other animals; have been used as a form of money; and have been a source of gems, food, and new medicines. After surviving multiple mass extinctions millions of years ago, molluscs and their shells still face an onslaught of anthropogenic challenges, including climate change and corrosive oceans. But rather than dwelling on all that is lost, Helen Scales emphasizes that seashells offer an accessible way to reconnect people with nature, helping to bridge the gap between ourselves and the living world.

SPIRALS IN TIME: THE SECRET LIFE AND CURIOUS AFTERLIFE OF SEASHELLS shows why nature matters and reveals the hidden wonders that you can hold in the palm of your hand.

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.

This is an exceptionally well written book by a British marine biologist. The book discusses primarily molluscs (Note: Scales uses this spelling in the book, so I'll use it here. The book uses British spellings throughout). The overall purpose of the book seems to be to convince the reader that molluscs are important, and she is convincing in that regard. Reader alert: if you do not think global warming is an issue, skip this book, because coming climate changes are coming is an important element in several chapters, most specifically one dealing with changing pH in the seas. She tells the story of shells largely through telling the story of people involved with shells (including herself). This includes shell collectors, researchers, museums and more. Each chapter has a central sort of theme the stories center on. One chapter discusses cowries and how they were long used as money; Dutch ships would use them as ballast and on arrival home, the shells would be auctioned off and used in the Atlantic slave trade, because cowries were used as money in much of Africa for centuries--shells from the Seychelles. Shells have been used as jewelry and some as trumpet-like horns. Perhaps the most interesting chapter is on the mundane oyster. I had no idea that oyster beds can be something like coral reefs in supporting varied other life, or that old oyster shells make an excellent substrate for young oysters, and I knew little about how shellfish filter water big time. Or that some species of oysters are sequential sex changers from female to male to female. One chapter seems to me to be a bit of a waste, the idea of sea silk, cloth made from the byssal fibers of certain shells; the stuff exists but this was the least interesting story she tells.

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