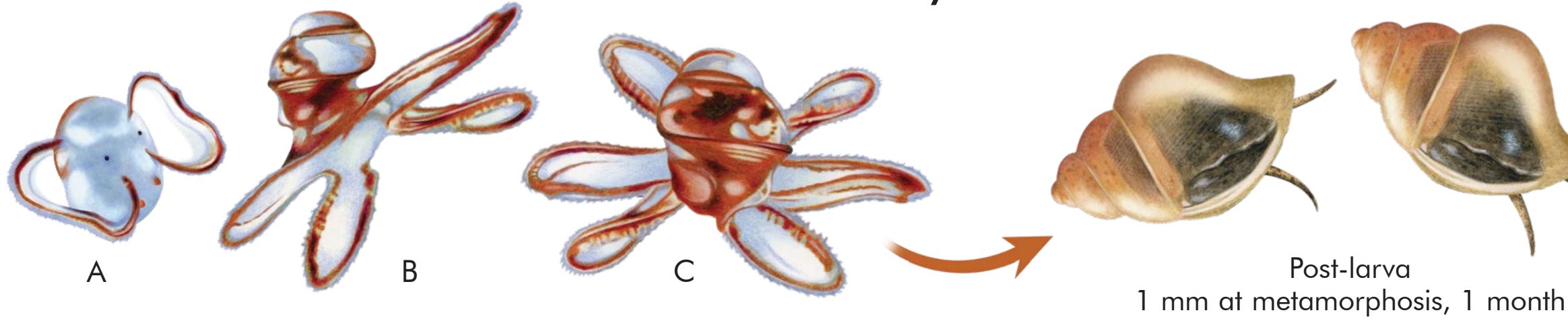


Queen Conch

Life Cycle



1 Newly hatched larvae, known as veligers, have 2-lobes (A) that divide into 4-lobes (B) and 6-lobes (C) during the three-week larval period. Short hairs (cilia) line the lobes and assist the veligers to move, breath, and feed.

2 After 3 weeks the veligers detect a cue from the seagrass beds that triggers metamorphosis. They lose their lobes and transition to using their foot to crawl, and proboscis to graze.

3 The juvenile conch lives in the seagrass meadows and bury in the sand for up to one year. The same shell they hatch with transitions from shades of brown to orange pink.

Infant Juvenile
up to 2.8 in (7 cm),
1–12 months
buried in sand

4 As the conch matures, they move to deeper sandy areas to breed. The conch is considered an adult at about 4 years old, once it has developed a full flared lip with a lip thickness of more than 0.6 in (15 mm) thick (the diameter of a Bahamian penny). The thicker the lip, the older the conch.

5 Although called the QUEEN conch, this mollusk has separate sexes. The male has a verge and the female an egg groove. During mating, the male extends its verge under the shell of the female to fertilize the eggs. The adult conch gathers in aggregations during warm months (April to September) to spawn.

Epifaunal Juvenile
2.8–7.0 in (7–18 cm), 1–3 years

Adult
Up to 12 in (30.5 cm),
4–40 years,
Lifespan 30–40 years

Male

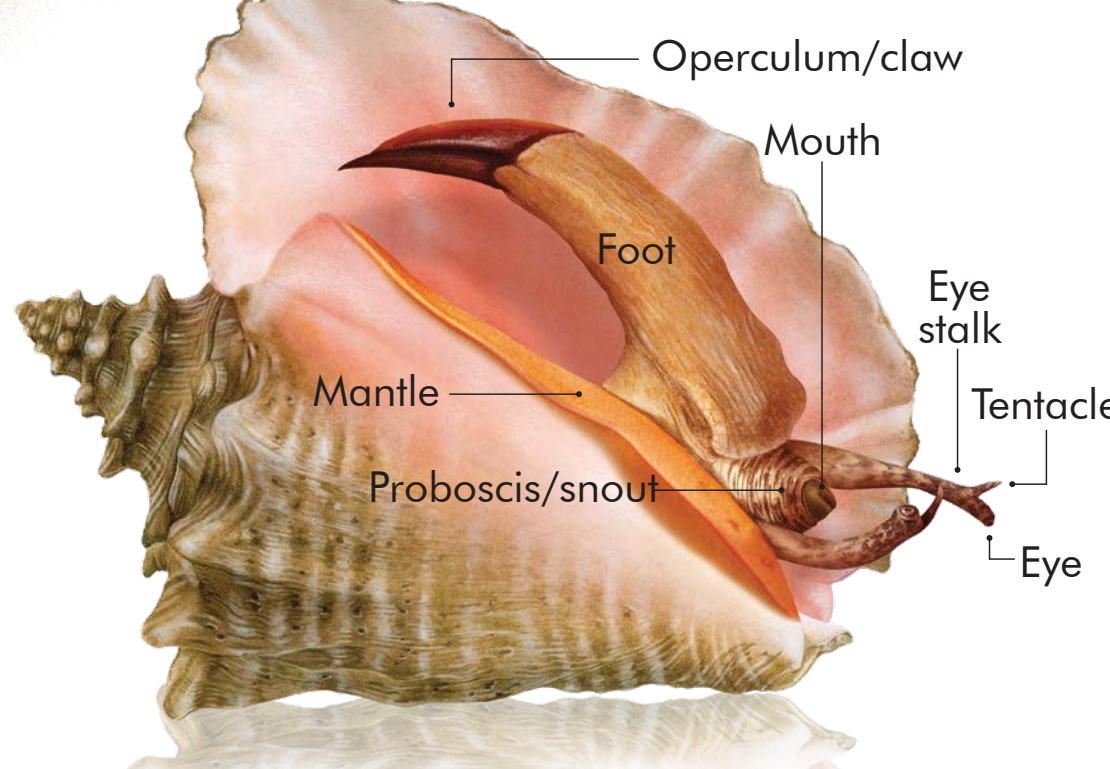
Female

7 The female conch lays an average of 9 crescent-shaped egg masses each breeding season. As the sticky egg mass strand is laid, sand adheres to it and provides camouflage from predators. The eggs incubate on the sandy bottom for 3–5 days before hatching into larvae.

Egg Mass
300,000 to 500,000 eggs,
about 6 in (15 cm) long

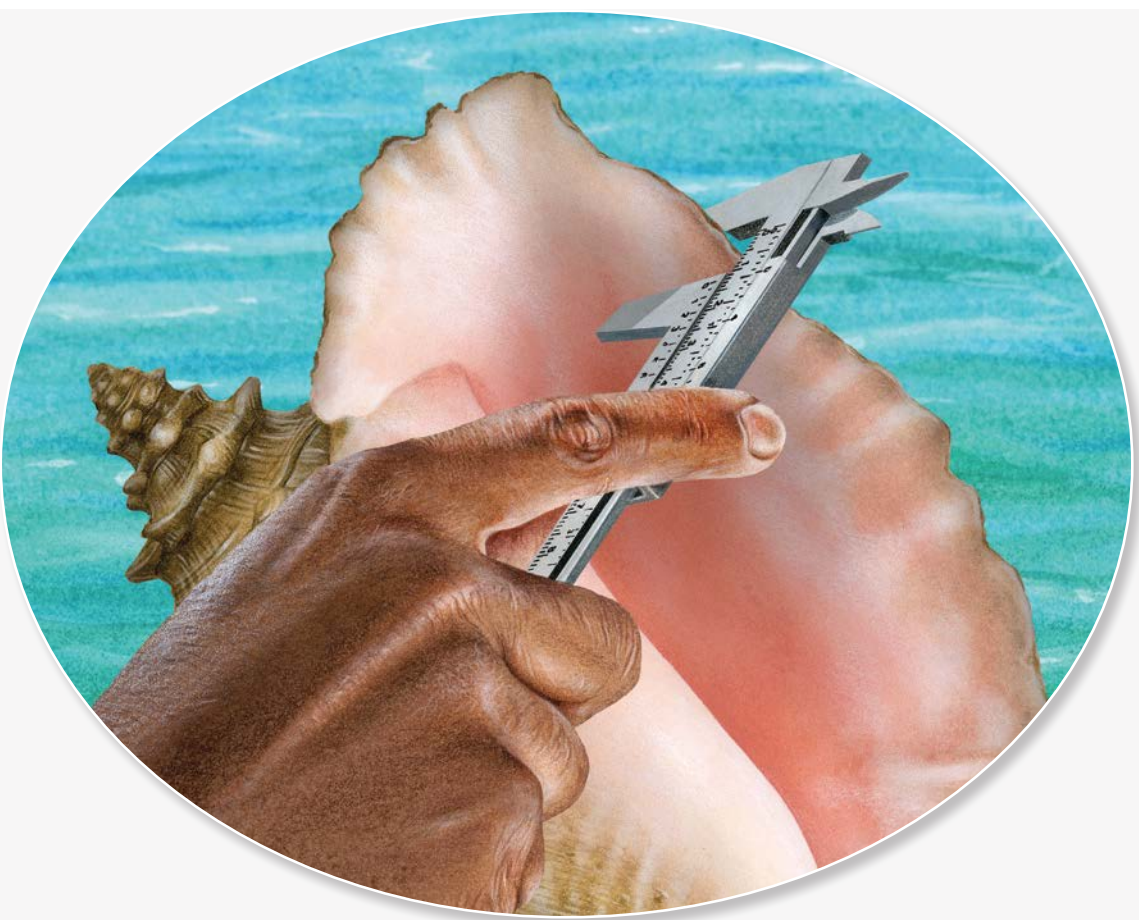
Queen Conch Anatomy

The Queen Conch is recognized by its large vibrant pink shell with a large flared lip. Inside the shell, the conch has a brownish gray speckled muscular foot with an operculum or claw used to propel the conch in a leaping action. The conch also has 2 long eyestalks each with a sensory tentacle and between its eyes is a tube-like mouth (proboscis) used for grazing. The conch shell typically grows to 12 inches (30.5 cm) in length and reaches an average of 5 pounds (2.3 kg).



Importance

The Conch Fishery contributes significantly to The Bahamas, both socially and economically. Conch meat is considered a delicacy and is used in numerous culinary dishes, including salads, stews, and fritters. The conch shell is also used in decorations and jewelry.



Threats

Queen Conch populations are declining throughout The Caribbean. Its over popularity, slow maturity, and habitat choice can result in overharvesting and juvenile harvesting. For this reason, The Queen Conch is listed under Appendix II of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES). This means, conch can be traded if a sustainable fishery management plan is in place. Many Caribbean nations, including The Bahamas, are signatories of CITES.

Conservation

The Bahamas' efforts to manage their Conch Fishery include quotas for conch harvest and export, prohibition of scuba gear use during conch fishing, and harvested conch must have a well-formed lip. In addition, underwater national parks such as the Exuma Cays Land and Sea Park, are established and managed by the Bahamas National Trust to protect The Queen Conch and other marine animals from being fished.

How to Help

- Respect government regulations
- Support conch conservation efforts
- Report harmful conch fishing practices to The Bahamas Department of Marine Resources

The Queen Conch is a marine gastropod found in seagrass beds in The Bahamas, South Florida, and the Caribbean. In the Caribbean, it is known as the pink conch, lambi, currucho, caracol rosado, and karko. Its scientific name is *Aliger gigas*.

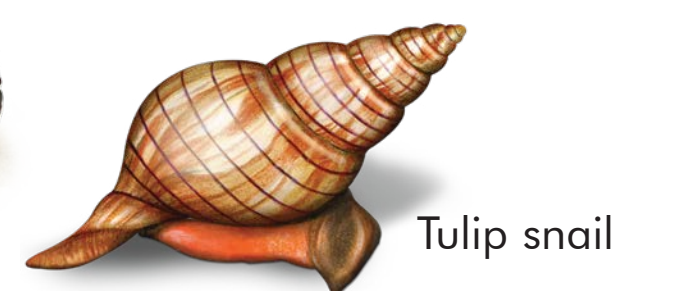
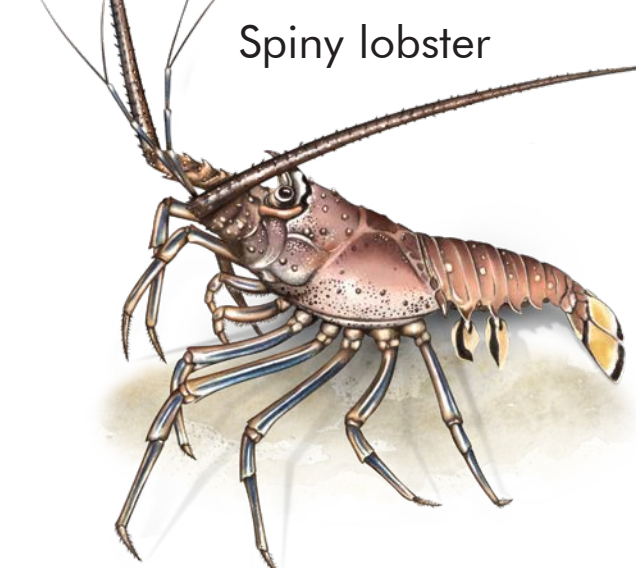
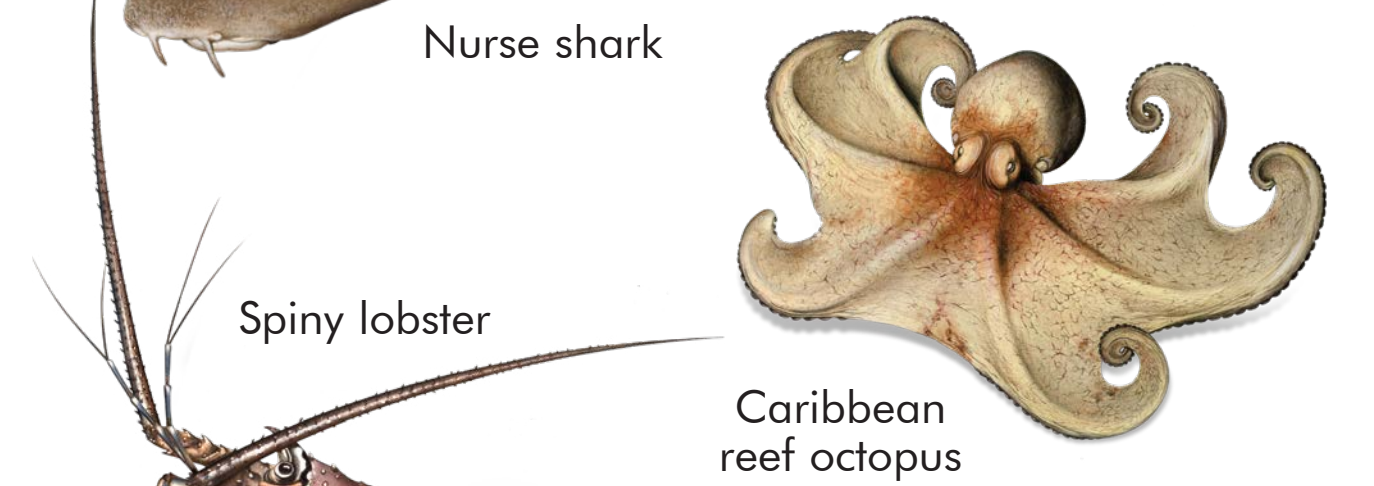
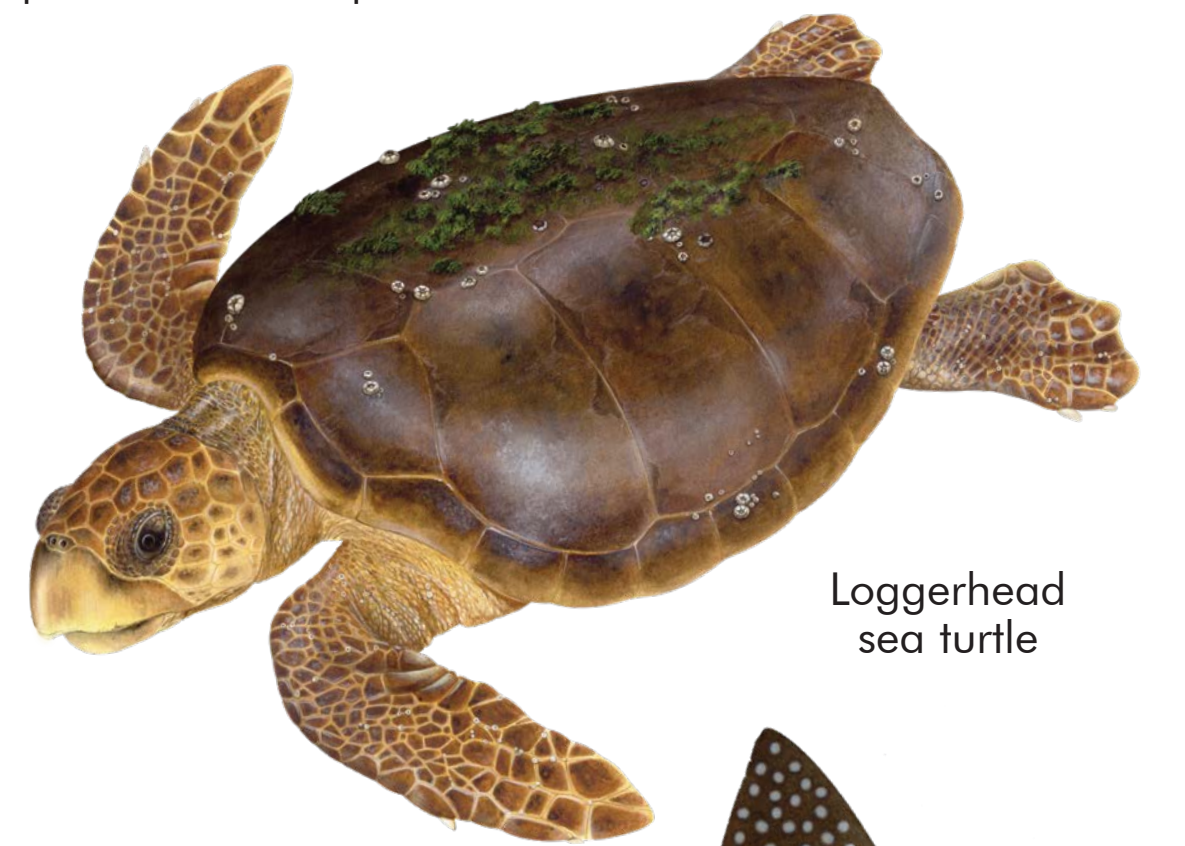
Queen Conch Diet

The conch is herbivorous, a plant eater. In their larval stage, they feed on phytoplankton. However, as juveniles and adults, they graze on epiphytes, which are algae found on seagrass blades.



Natural Predators

Larvae are prone to being eaten by small fish and other zooplankton while drifting in ocean currents. As they age, a shell is formed that continues to thicken and develop spines for added protection.



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FLORIDA ATLANTIC UNIVERSITY*

