

# A scarce endemic fissurellid

by Mike Els



## ***Diodora elizabethae* EA Smith, 1901**

*Diodora elizabethae* is well-known to beach collectors in the Eastern Cape, but specimens in good condition are very difficult to find. They are robust shells, with strong ribbing, but much of the finer sculpture is usually worn away by the time it has reached the shore.

Over the years I have always hoped to find a living specimen, either intertidally or whilst diving, but had to wait many years until November 2004, when I was fortunate to find the illustrated live specimen. I was exploring a reef area off Cape Recife, Algoa Bay, in 16m depth, on low profile reef which

was richly covered in Coralline seaweeds (*Amphiroa ephedraea*, *Corallina* sp. etc) which are abundant on slightly shallower reef in this area, usually with a fair to high amount of surge. Due to this brisk water movement loose rocks which may harbour shells beneath them are usually very hard to find in this environment, most rocks being deeply embedded in the sand in reef cracks.

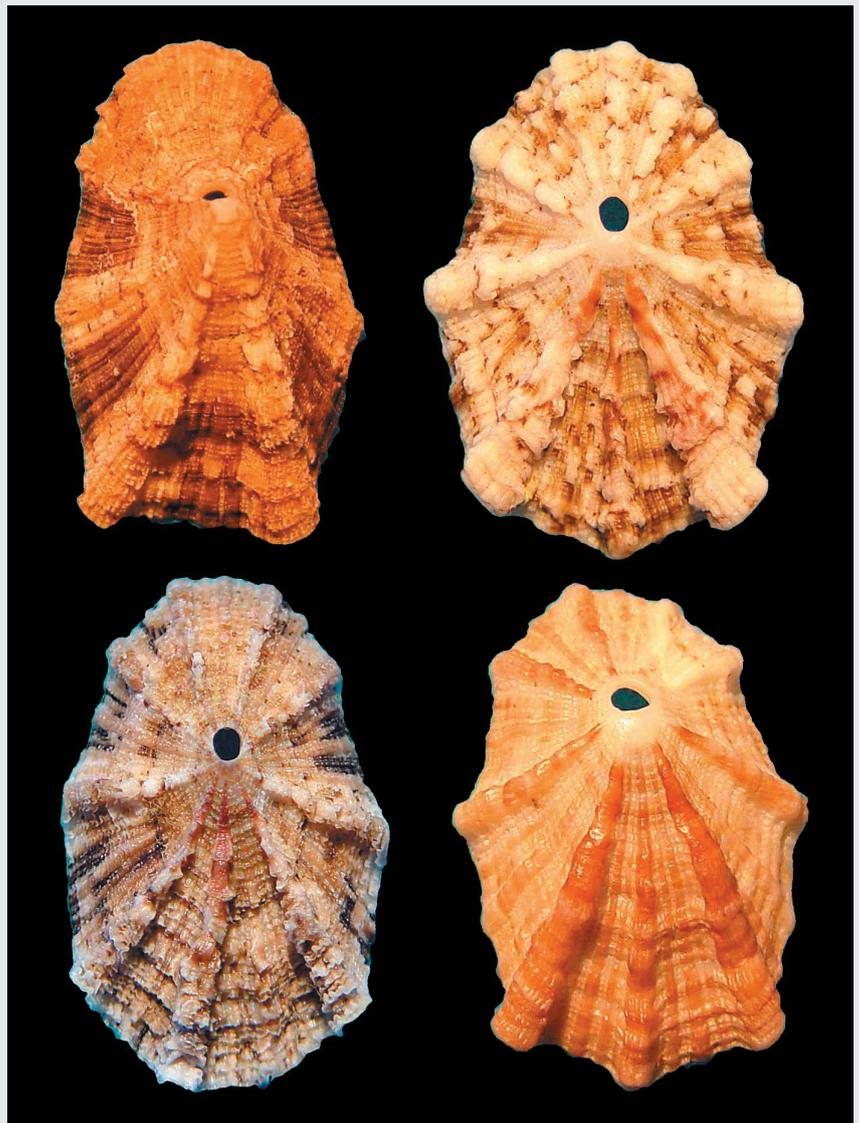
On finding one such rock, I lifted it to find that approximately 15cm of Coralline weed encrusted rock lay above the sand. Immediately adjacent to my fingers I noticed a flat pale yellow structure surmounted by

weed. On close inspection this was indeed my long-hoped for *Diodora elizabethae*! I carefully removed it and placed it in my collecting bottle to photograph later.

The specimen was extremely cryptic in natural habitat and this factor is probably the main reason that so few live taken specimens have been reported by collectors. After some searching on the Web, I did encounter a photo of what appeared to be two live taken specimens, but small - (about 18mm). It appears to live on the reef in exposed position, relying on its camouflage to avoid detection. The numerous fine scales trap silt and the various attached organisms add to its rock-like appearance. The specimen measured 35mm.

There appears to be a significant difference in shells from the cooler southern waters to those in the warmer Transkei /Natal areas. Beach shells from the Xora area are more elevated with reddish tinge to the ribbing.

I have heard of *ex-piscibus* specimens from Natal and have a few dead taken specimens from 90m off Northern Transkei – see illustration. The northern deepwater specimens are markedly elevated (much more so than the beach specimens)



Variation within *Diodora elizabethae*

, lightweight and more angular. I presume that some may have been taken live by dredging. The much squatter, heavier Eastern Cape specimens may be due to their shallower water habitat – or are they two different species? I have seen too little of the Transkei/Natal material to form an opinion.

I would appreciate feedback from other collectors via The Strandloper about their experiences with this South African endemic.

