

Baler volute at Changi Beach

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Subject: Baler volute, *Melo melo* (Mollusca: Gastropoda: Volutidae).

Subject identified by: Cheo Pei Rong and Jonathan Tan.

Location, date and time: Johor Strait, Changi Beach, by carpark 7; 24 June 2020; 0752 hrs.

Habitat: Estuarine shore. Seagrass meadow at intertidal zone, exposed during morning low tide.

Observers: Spencer Yau Jia Ming and Low Si Hui.

Observation: A large example (Fig. 1-3) with an estimated shell length of 25 cm and a weight of about 2 kg was found, exposed during low tide, within a patch of seagrass consisting of several species. The shell was heavily encrusted with barnacles (Fig. 2 & 3). In Fig. 3, the hand of one of the observers was used as a size comparison. After examination, the animal was released into the rising tide water.



Fig. 1. Apertural view of the baler shell with the mantle exposed.



Fig. 2. Dorsal view of the shell heavily covered with barnacles and other encrusting organisms.

Photographs by Spencer J. M. Yau

Remarks: The baler volute is a locally endangered species (Davison et al., 2008) that suffers ongoing threats such as habitat loss, entrapment in fishing nets, and exploitation for the shell souvenir trade and human consumption (Ah Hua Kelong, 2015). This carnivorous marine snail occurs only in the coastal seas around Southeast Asia and is more active at night. It burrows to forage for smaller snails and seems to prefer soft substrates like mud and sand (Yeo, 2012). Commonly found in the littoral zone, individuals occasionally get washed ashore (Tan & Ng, 1998).

In Singapore, it appears that the most recent reported sighting of this large snail was at East Coast Park on 9 September 2018 (Cheah, 2018). Earlier, one was observed at Changi Beach in front of car-park 7 at 0545 hrs on 11 August 2018 (Tan, not dated). The barnacle-encrusted shell of the featured example could imply that the specimen was not healthy or that it was of advanced age.

References:

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Fig. 3. Lateral view of the baler shell and exposed mantle with hand for scale. Photograph by Spencer J. M. Yau