

YZC Animal of the Month, May 2010

Giant Clam

Tridacna gigas



mussels, razor shells and scallops. They all have two shells (or valves) that enclose the soft-bodied animal inside. But measure a British bivalve, and you can see it is tiny compared with the Giant Clam, which can weigh up to 200kg and measure a metre or more across.

The Giant Clam is from the warm, shallow seas

In the display case in the entrance to the Museum of Zoology is a giant amongst invertebrates: *Tridacna gigas*, the Giant Clam. This is the world's largest mollusc alive today. This colossus of the sea can live an average of 100 years. The survival of this species is being threatened by people harvesting them for their meat.

Go to the seaside around Britain today and you can find the shells of lots of bivalve molluscs, such

of the South Pacific, from Thailand and Japan in the north to Australia in the south. Here the mobile larval clam floats in the open water for around a week before settling on the sea floor. Once it fastens itself to the sea floor, that is it. The adult stays put, and feeds on passing plankton (tiny floating animals and plants) that it filters out of the water, as well as on the food produced by tiny algae living inside the clam's body.