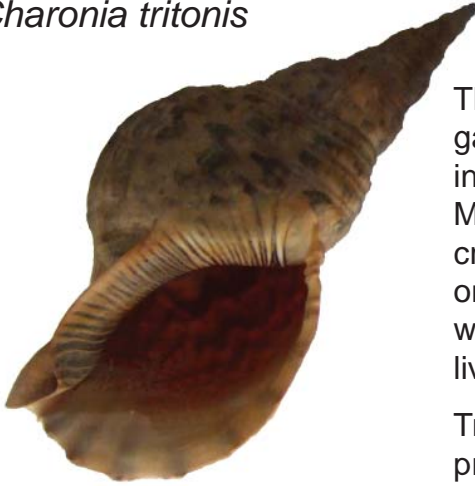


YZC Animal of the Month, February 2013

Trumpet Shell

Charonia tritonis



Ever wondered which animal would make a good musical instrument? Wonder no more – shells like these are turned into a wind instrument called a Horagai in Japan, and a Putona in French Polynesia by removing the tip of the shell to make it possible to blow down it.

The common name of this animal is a Trumpet Shell and sometimes Triton's Trumpet after the Greek god of the sea. In Greek myths, Triton was able to calm the seas by blowing on his shell trumpet. The shell is large and beautiful, but what would the animal that called it home have been like?

The Trumpet Shell is a gastropod mollusc that lives in the sea. The Gastropod Molluscs include such creatures as slugs and snails on land, and limpets, conches, whelks and many more that live in the world's oceans.

Trumpet Shells are big predators. They are one of the few creatures that can feed on the prickly Crown of Thorns starfish. Crown of Thorns starfish can be very destructive on coral reefs, and very few creatures can tackle their poisonous spines. A Trumpet Shell grips onto its prey, and rasps a hole in the armoured outside using a structure called the radulla (a ribbon-like organ with a sharp, rasp-like surface). Once inside, it squirts in saliva that paralyzes the prey, and can get to work on eating the squidgy bits. Trumpet Shells can move quite quickly, picking up the scent of their prey and 'chasing' them, rather than waiting around for food to come their way.