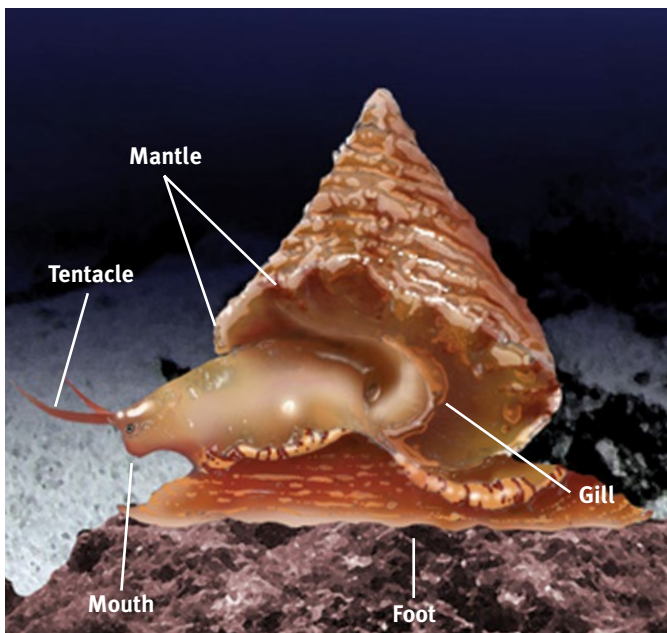


Molluscs are one of the largest groups in the animal kingdom. They have soft bodies and generally have a hard shell for protection, which is why many are called 'shellfish'. Most molluscs are found in the ocean, but some can be found in freshwater and on land.

There are seven different groups (classes) of molluscs:

Gastropoda

Gastropods are the largest and most diverse class of molluscs and include sea snails and sea slugs. Meaning "stomach foot", gastropods have a large muscular foot attached to a body that is coiled within a single spiralled shell. Most have gills and a well-developed head with eyes and tentacles. Nudibranchs or sea slugs are gastropods without a shell.



Aplacophora

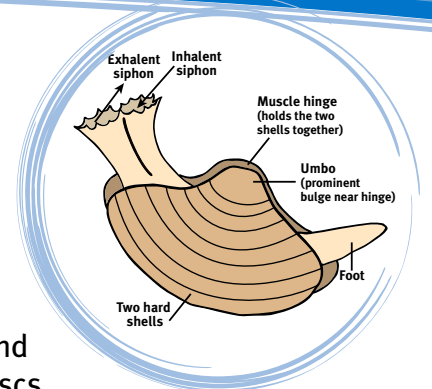
Aplacophorans are the smallest class and are worm-like marine molluscs living mostly in deep water. Meaning 'bearer of no shells', the mantle of the Aplacophora does not produce a shell but is embedded with hard calcareous spicules (needle-like rods), possibly to deter predators. The foot is either much reduced or completely absent.

Bivalvia

The name bivalve literally means 'two shells' – a shell with two halves, joined by a hinge, enclosing a flattened body.

Bivalves are the second largest class of molluscs

and include animals such as mussels, scallops and oysters. They have no head and therefore no radula, so they generally filter food particles from the water.



Cephalopoda

Squid, octopus, cuttle (or cuttlefish) and nautilus belong to the class of molluscs known as cephalopods. Meaning 'head foot', the muscular foot common to molluscs has become suckered tentacles that appear to be joined to the head. The basic mollusc shell is internal and highly modified, or in the case of octopus absent altogether. Cephalopods are the most intelligent of all invertebrates, with an advanced nervous system, a well-developed head and complex eyes.

Polyplacophora

Meaning 'bearer of plates', the polyplacophorans or chitons are adapted for life on rocky surfaces in the intertidal zone. They are oval in shape and have eight separate articulated plates (which look like armour) that overlap to form the shell. A tough, scaly tissue called the girdle surrounds the shell.

Scaphopoda

These marine molluscs are known as tooth or tusk shells as the shell is tusk-shaped, but unlike most molluscs the shell is open at both ends. Scaphopod means 'spade foot', referring to the muscular foot of the animal which anchors the larger end of the shell into sand.

Monoplacophora

Monoplacophorans are a deep water limpet-like mollusc.