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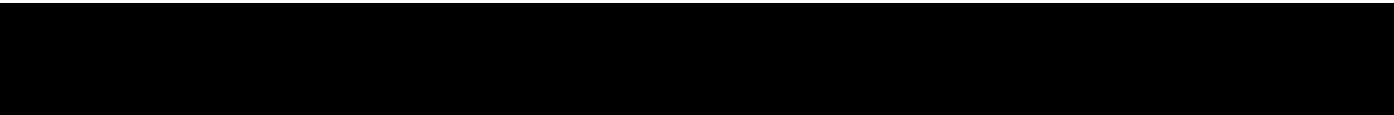
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***CONUS MACARAE* FROM THE MASBATE FISHING GROUNDS**

Guido T. Poppe
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INTRODUCTION

Since about 6 months, more than 30 fishing boats (bankas) are intensively trawling around Masbate Island. Out of their catch we state that most shells come from mud bottoms situated between 30 and 120 m. Shells in this case are a by-product from fish. Among these, the "*Conus voluminalis*", now *Conus macarae* Bernardi, 1857 draw attention by their very select beauty and the large palette of background colours and patterns. We could gather about 200 specimens, and many of the best of these are shown here.

SIZES IN MASBATE

The largest specimen caught measures 63 mm. Average size is 40 mm. Probably because of the kind of mesh used, juvenile specimens have not been taken.

CONDITION OF THE SHELLS

This *Conus*-species has a very porcellaneous structure, and because of this many specimen come up with broken lips and/or chipped siphonal canals. There is a high percentage of shells that show growth lines, very often severe ones that ruin the specimens for aesthetic collections. The spires are often covered with *Balanus*, either around the spire or on top of the dorsum. This suggests that the shells do not burrow very deep in the substrate.

VARIATION IN COLOUR

It is curious to state that at first glance shells can be split in two groups with a basic different colour:

1. Yellow background (this goes from lemon yellow to orange). (about 65 %)
2. White background (from white to pastel pink). (about 35 %)

In both groups, a minority of the shells (about 5 %) have only two broad spiral bands as a pattern. Dots,

blotches etc... are absent. In fact these look as specimens in which the background colour becomes darker to form spiral bands. Mid-whorl there is a pale spiral band (the pale background colour).

The other remaining 95 % of the shells show a rich variety in pattern. One can easily distinguish several groups that are shown below. However, these groups form certainly no taxonomic units as intermediates are numerous. Apart from being a puzzle to the scientists, they are the delight of collectors.

It is curious to see that a minority of shells show a fine spiral line pattern, much the same as the one found in *Conus shikamai*. Among the yellow shells, we could find only 4 such specimens. They are more numerous in the white background ones: about 20 shells.

We are aware that the analysis above is not absolute: for example we found 5 shells with a white mid-whorl spiral band that, because of the colour of the spire definitely belong to the yellow background group. On the other hand we found no true intermediates between the yellow and white background groups.

NOMENCLATURAL REMARKS

The type figure of *C. voluminalis* Reeve, 1843 is certainly not the species called *macarae* Bernardi (See RKK, pl. 30, figs. 1 & 3). The Sowerby's drawing talents were precise enough, and they got a perfect sense for shell shapes: the type figure of *C. voluminalis* has a much too convex shell as to be attributed to what is called today *C. voluminalis*. None of the Masbate shells and/or the shells figured by RKK show the deep groves (or pattern) as in the drawing. The ration shoulder/height also does not fit. *Conus macarae* Bernardi is the correct name for this taxon.

Discussing the problem last Sunday with *Conus* expert E. Wils (Belgium) I was surprised that he immediately agreed on the fact that *C. voluminalis* is not the correct name for the shells called as such today. He thinks that the type figure of Reeve is a *Conus eximius*, and indeed, as the text of Reeve indicates "Straits of Malacca", E. Wils may be correct.

Figure 9 in RKK shows a Thailand specimen which may belong to the same species, but that deserves a subspecific status. We obtained 3 similar shells (but in better condition) during a January visit to Phuket. These Thailand "*macaræ*" are all bigger, have, as far as we could state, not the wide colour palette as shown in the smaller type. If the normal small type of *macaræ* also frolics on the same fishing grounds, then the large type even deserves a species status. Walls figures 5 Thailand shells of for sure the same taxon as the Masbate shells. We need more information on these shells, as dealers from Thailand often mix up Philippine material.

The *C. macaræ (voluminalis)* is not reported from Japan or Australia.

A very closely related species is the confusing *Conus recluzianus*. When looking at the type figure I feel this is very much the shell named later *C. urashimanus*. This, in general overall brown shell, deserves probably a specific status (at least a subspecific status).

The colours of RKK plate 28, figs 14 to 17 fall well within the range of the Masbate *voluminalis*, but according to the text there are differences in microsculpture of the first whorls and on the spire.

Conus roseorapum (RKK plate 28 figs. 18, 21-25) is definitely a valid species: Philippine shells are fished by tangle net in Panglao, Balicasag and Balut. Their coronate shoulder, very fragile, almost glassy shells that go into a wide variety of pastel colours are so particular. No Philippine fisherman will ever confuse this with a *macaræ ("voluminalis")*.

We obtained also a few *C. shikamai* from the Masbate fisherman, and one can wonder if the few spi-

rally dotted *C. macaræ* are not the result of interbreeding with this species.

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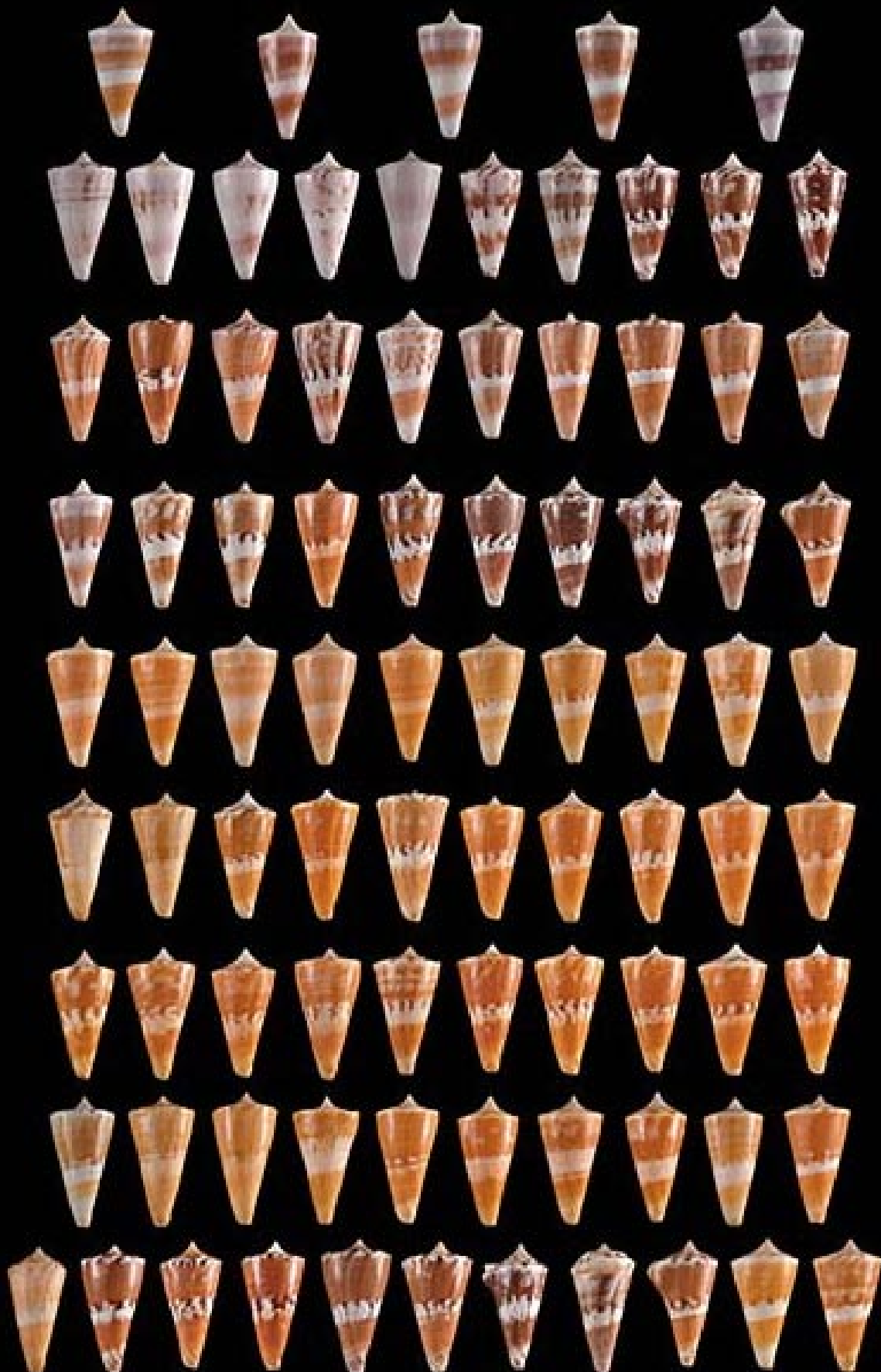
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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NOTE

I want to state that is not a thorough study on the subject: it is a minor correction on what appears in recent literature an obvious gigantic misunderstanding. It may well be that the species was described earlier than Bernardi under another name.

Remarks on all the above are very welcome. (Guido@conchology.be).



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