

Shake, Rattle, and Roll

Lightning whelks (*Busycon contarium*), or sea snails are a type of gastropod that live within their own seashell. They are found all along the shallow waters of the U.S. Atlantic and Gulf Coast shorelines. Whelks have a sculptured spiral shell that coils either to the right or left-hand side and then tapers to a point at one end. The marked ridges, knobs, spins, and whorls on the shell distinguish what type of species of whelk it is.

In the summertime, female lightning whelks lay a yellowish string of coin shaped egg capsules. The string of capsules is attached to rocks, shells, or weeds in the ocean and in time, break off and wash ashore. The capsules are shaped like rattles and found along the shoreline. Each capsule in the string holds up to 200 eggs and has a small hole at the top to allow the young whelks to escape after hatching. Look for these egg cases mixed in with the seaweed in the beach drift and remember...it's not a baby's rattle, but the egg case of a lightning whelk.

