

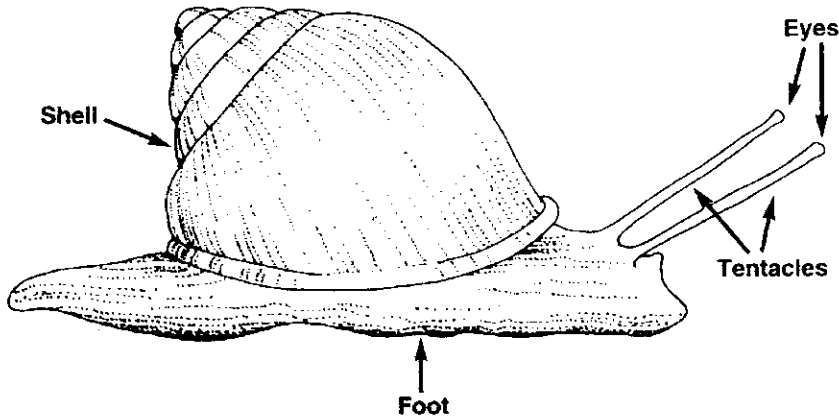
Reading Selection

Snails: A Head at the End of a Foot

Snails are found all over the globe. There are more than 1,500 kinds that live on land, 35,000 kinds in the sea, and 80,000 kinds in fresh water. Snails belong to a large class of animals called **gastropods**. This odd sounding name has an equally odd meaning: "stomach foot."

Gastropods have certain features in common. For instance, most have a soft body protected by a shell. A part of the soft body that sticks out from the shell is called the "foot." It is made mainly of muscles and helps the snail move. The snail's foot also releases a thin film of mucus. The snail glides over this film.

POND SNAIL

**Like an Antenna**

The head (at the end of the foot!) has a set of tentacles with eyes. Snails can pull in these tentacles; you may be able to observe your snail moving them up and down, like a car radio antenna. The snail sees poorly. It can probably only tell the difference between light and dark. Snails are silent and cannot hear.

The snail's mouth is on the underside of the head. Look for it when your snail glides along the side of the aquarium. The mouth is a small opening that opens and closes. Inside is a tongue called a **radula**. The radula has tiny teeth that file down the snail's food into bits.

Looking for Baby Snails

Most snails reproduce by laying eggs. You may be lucky enough to find some in your own aquarium. Examine the plants and the sides of the aquarium. Do you see a small jellylike mass containing tiny, developing snails? Look carefully close to the water line. Use a hand lens to watch them grow inside the "jelly" for a week or two. Then they will simply walk out, little copies of their parents.

As the baby snail's soft body grows, its outer shell does, too. The snail makes its own shell, much the same way you make your own fingernails. To do this, the snail needs calcium from the environment. (Why do you think it's important for you to drink milk?) Inside the snail's body, an organ called the **mantle** secretes the shell.

Pond snails are **scavengers**.

They eat the soft tissues of dead plants and animals. You might call them the "cleanup crew" of their environment. Pond snails also will eat algae and live plants. In turn, snails are food for fish, turtles, ducks, large insects, and mammals.