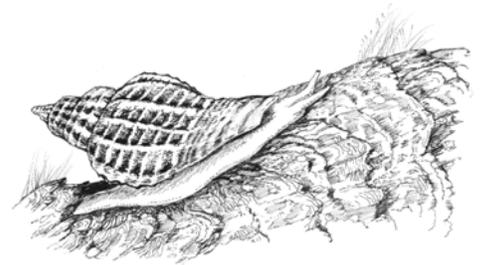




## Oyster drills – the Oyster’s Enemy

### What are they?

Oyster drills are small snails. Like the eastern mudsnail, they belong to a family of animals called gastropods. Gastropods are part of the mollusk family (animals like clams and oysters that have some kind of hard shell). Gastropods are animals that have one large foot (the word *gastropod* means “stomach foot.”) Many gastropods, including oyster drills, have a coiled shell.



### What do they look like?

Atlantic oyster drills are smaller snails, averaging between 1 and two inches long. Their hard shells are knobby and coiled. When oyster drills are in danger, they can quickly close a kind of trap door over the opening in their shells, protecting their soft bodies.

They have one yellow foot, which sticks out of their shells. This foot allows them to move slowly about their environment.

In order to find food, oyster drills use a long tube-like structure called a siphon. These siphons also draw water into the oyster drills’ gills. Their gills filter out oxygen that is carried in the water.

### Where can you find them?

Oyster drills live in oyster beds (colonies of oysters). They prefer the saltier water found in the middle and lower Bay.

### How do they behave?

Oyster drills got their name because of the way they eat oysters and other shelled animals. They crawl about oyster beds, searching for food using their siphons. Once they sense that they have found a meal, they begin to drill a hole through their prey’s shell. First of all, they ooze a kind of acid on the shell. The acid softens up the hard shell. Then they use a special body part called a radula to drill away. Radulas are muscles covered with teeth. They function as a kind of chain saw, digging into the shells. Once they have broken through the shell, oyster drills break apart and eat the soft bodies of their prey. This process usually takes six – eight hours.

### What do they eat?

Oyster drills are one of the American oyster’s main predators. They prefer to eat young oysters because their shells are thinner than adult oysters.

They will also drill through and eat other shelled animals, such as clams, other snails, and crabs.

### What eats them?

Especially when they are very young, oyster drills are eaten by fish, birds, and blue crabs.

### Creature Feature

How do oyster drills know that the shells they are crawling on actually have a good meal inside?

Researchers have found that the oyster drills actually “smell” their food. Oysters and other shelled animals on the oyster drills’ menus have a certain body odor. This body odor is made up of little bits of chemicals. When the drills smell one of these chemicals, they know they have found their next meal.