

Flap-tipped or Flat-tipped – the *Penitella penita* Flip-Flop

by Bill Merilees

In 1953, John Fitch of the California Marine Fisheries Branch, published his “Common Marine Bivalves of California” (Bulletin No. 90). Noting for *Penitella penita* that, “an elongated chitinous flap is formed at the tip of each shell”, (see photos) he gave this species the common name, Flap-tipped Piddock (p. 99). This moniker then became the species “Official” California common name.

Up to this time *Penitella penita* (Conrad, 1837), was known either by this scientific name, (Oldroyd, (1924), La Rocque, (1953), Bernard, (1967, and 1983), and Baxter (1987) or as the Common Piddock, (Johnson and Snook, (1927), Keep and Baily, (1935), Webb, (1942), Keen, (1947), Morris, (1966) and White, (1976)). Carefoot, (1977) used the name Pacific Coast Piddock.

Please note: The list of references referred to in this article is **not** a complete review of the literature available!

McLean (1969), Abbott, (1974), and Kozloff (1983), adopted Fitch’s, Flap-tipped Piddock as the common name. Turgeon et al. (1988) uses Flap-tip Piddock, a minor change, but the use of ‘flap’ rather than ‘flat’ is of particular interest. Published by the American Fisheries Society, (Special Publication 16) the title of this reference, “Common and scientific names of aquatic invertebrates from the United States and Canada: Mollusks”, became a standard reference of the time. The second edition of this publication (1998), retains Flap-tip Piddock.

[Why this reference is not better known and more widely used appears a mystery?]

Foster, (1991) states the common names she used, “are from Turgeon et al. (1988)”. This said, she uses the name Flat-tip Piddock in her species description (p. 127) and index. Might this simply be an editorial typo?

Fast forward to the present! Harbo, (1997), Coan et al. (2000), Lamb and Handby, (2005), and Sept, (2019) all now use the name Flat-tip Piddock for *Penitella penita*. Something has ‘run amok’. It now appears we have lost a very accurate descriptive, common name from our molluscan lexicon, flap being replaced flat.

Way back in 1953, when John Fitch first put forward the common name Flap-tipped Piddock, he also created an interesting irony! Not in his description of the species, nor in the index, but under the topic of this species’ use (p. 97). Here the name, “flat-tipped piddock” appears! Perhaps this is the just the first in a series of similar typos, that may just account for this current common name flip-flop.

Whatever the circumstances, it is hard to believe that, for all the more recent publications cited, that typos alone are responsible?

What the future holds for common names such as Flap-tipped or Flat-tip Piddock, in a field without formal rules, is anyone’s guess. For this author, this has been an interesting ‘ride’!

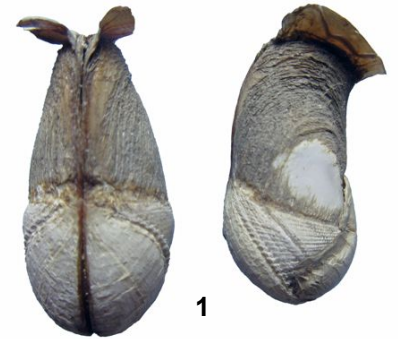
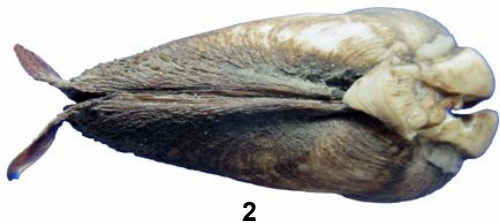


Photo 1: *Penitella penita* - Collection Number # 91-20 - Juvenile *Penitella penita* - Size (left) 32 mm: (right) 26 mm. July 12, 1991, LeClair Point, Hesquiat Harbour, dug from hard sandstone rock.

Photos 2 and 3 are of the same individual: Collection Number # 94-11 - Size 56 mm. July 21, 1994, Yakan Point, Graham Island, Haida Gwaii, dug from blue clay.



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Stop the presses! Flap-tip Piddock still survives, see Bisby, F.A. et al (2005)!

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