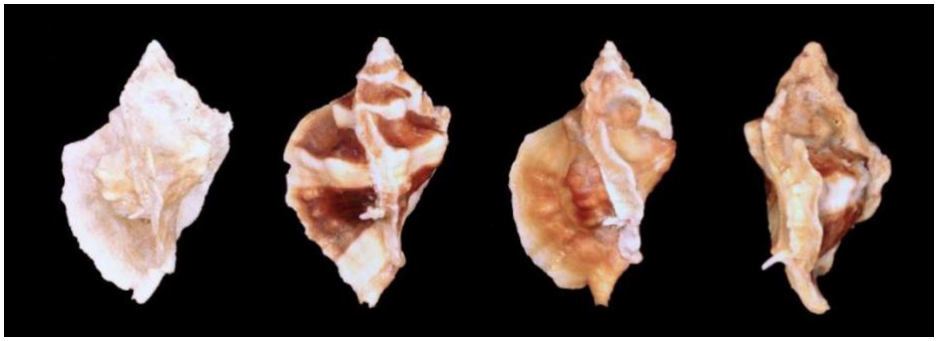
Family Muricidae

Ceratostoma nuttalli (Conrad, 1837)



Common Name: Nuttall's Hornmouth

Images: The shell is variable in color, ranging from nearly all white to nearly all brown. The most common color form is white or white with horizontal brown bands. There are three wings (varices) the margins of which are slightly ruffled. A distinctive spine on the aperture is located a short distance above the start of the syphon cannel (far right).

Distribution: San Louis Obispo County, California (Berschauer & Clark, 2019), and south down the Pacific coast of into Baja California Mexico.

Habitat: The species is associated with rock reefs off shore to at least 75 feet, but is more common from subtidal to 25 feet. In shallow water it is more prevalent in channels and bays where it has been observed feeding on barnacles and limpets. Not prevalent in shallow water exposed to surf. Generally uncommon north of Point Conception, Santa Barbara, California.

Size: The length of most shells observed in shallow water is 25 to 40 mm. Large shells to 55 mm and slightly greater are occasionally found in deeper water off shore (50+ feet).

Notes: *Cerastostoma nuttalli* and *C. foliatum* (Gmelin, 1791) both occur in southern California. The waters in the area of San Diego apparently are too warm for *C. foliatum*, as no live specimens have been reported. *Ceratostoma foliatum* is a larger shell adapted to cooler water prevalent in the northern channel islands. In southern California the varices of *C. foliatum* are very prominent, with strongly scalloped margins. Specimen, text and photos by Paul Tuskes.

Reference: For more details see: Morris R.H. et. al. 1980, Intertidal Invertebrates of California. For additional photographs: Berschauer & Clark. 2018. Marine Shells of the California Province.