

INFORMATION SHEET



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Nudibranchs and flatworms - A photographic atlas for the Bass Strait region

Museum Victoria and ReefWatch Victoria have launched a project using divers, snorkellers and underwater photographers to learn more about nudibranchs and flatworms. The information sheets *Nudibranchs* and *Marine flatworms* provide more details of these interesting marine organisms. The flatworm and nudibranch fauna of the Bass Strait region is not well known, so a photographic atlas project can make a major contribution to knowledge of these fascinating marine invertebrates.



Nudibranch *Ceratosoma brevicaudatum*
Photographer: Mark Norman / Source: Museum Victoria

The atlas project

Collections in museums such as Museum Victoria are our primary source of information about nudibranchs and flatworms (and the rest of our fauna), and it is vital to be able to examine collections of scientific specimens to fully describe an animal. However, colour photographs of many nudibranchs and flatworms can often be identified accurately, and these photographs will become "virtual specimens", enlarging our "collection". In some ways a photograph is better than a specimen: not only does it show the living animal in colour, but often allows identification of a food item or preferred habitat.



Flatworm *Cycloporus australis*
Photographer / Source: John Chuk

What can I do?

The first step is to register with ReefWatch Victoria (see contact details below) and you will be sent further information, including a monitoring kit for a variety of marine life.

We need photographers who are willing to share underwater photographs with the project (preferably as a digital or other copy of your original image). Whether you dive a lot or occasionally, your photographs and observations will be valuable. We also need to know some basic information about where and when the photograph was taken. ReefWatch will provide a spreadsheet file (or paper form) to assist recording this information. You will need a unique identification number on each photograph or file, linking to other information on the spreadsheet or form. If you are not already doing so, it would be a good idea to record this information for all your photographs. ReefWatch will also provide a copyright release form that will allow us to use the images on the web or to distribute as an identification guide to other ReefWatchers.

What if I am not a photographer?

Initially, it is a photographic record that we need most of all. However, non-photographers can still contribute. All ReefWatch participants receive a monitoring kit which includes photographs of three common nudibranchs. Include any observations of these species in your data sheet logs. During 2005 we will begin distribution of identification kits for other common nudibranchs and flatworms, and non-photographers will be able to monitor a wider range of species.

What *not* to do!

Most importantly, do not take any risks, and always dive safely. Neither ReefWatch nor Museum Victoria wants anyone to take any risks, nor can we insure you and your dive buddies. Make sure that you are diving under appropriate certification and procedures through your own dive club or similar organisation.

Do not collect anything. In most cases a colour photograph is all we need. If it becomes necessary to collect a few specimens, for example to resolve a taxonomic problem, we will arrange collecting permits and issue identification cards for the species we are seeking.

Do not disturb animals in the wild. We want to know as much detail as we can about the natural distribution and preferences of each species. Please do not reposition the animal on a different seaweed or sponge to make a more pleasing photograph – if you do we will learn about your own preferences, not those of the nudibranch or flatworm! (If you accidentally move the specimen, a photograph is still useful since it will record the general location and depth, but make a note that the specimen was moved by human hand.)

About ReefWatch

Reef Watch is a project that encourages divers and snorkellers to monitor marine life at their favourite dive sites. The project has been developed by the Australian Marine Conservation Society and the Marine and Coastal Community Network. Reef Watch volunteer divers are supplied with a monitoring kit to carry out surveys in areas in which they choose. ReefWatch helps divers and snorkellers to:

- Monitor and report seasonal changes in plants and animals;
- Report special natural history phenomena or events;
- Serve as a 'Neighbourhood Watch' program – reporting exotic pest invasions, illegal fishing practice, dumping and polluting.

Contacts

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InfoZone

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Web: <http://infozone.museum.vic.gov.au/>

[InfoZone is the first contact point for bringing photographs to ReefWatch Victoria. Located on the lower ground floor of Melbourne Museum, Carlton Gardens, between Rathdowne and Nicholson Streets. InfoZone is free entry, open 10am-4.30pm Monday to Sunday.]



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Further reading

- Burn, R. 1989. Opisthobranchs (Subclass Opisthobranchia). In Shepherd, S. A. and Thomas, I. M. (eds), *Marine Invertebrates of Southern Australia. Part II*. South Australian Government Printing Division, Adelaide, pp. 725-788.
- Coleman, N. 1989. *Nudibranchs of the South Pacific* Vol.1. Neville Coleman's Sea Australia Resource Centre, 64 pp.
- Coleman, N. 2001. *1001 Nudibranchs - Catalogue of Indo-Pacific Sea Slugs* Neville Coleman's Underwater Geographic Pty Ltd, 144 pp.
- Edgar, G. J. 2000. *Australian Marine Life*. revised edition. Reed, Kew, Victoria. 544 pp.
- Newman, L. J. & Cannon, L. R. G. (2003). *Marine Flatworms – The World of Polyclads*. Melbourne: CSIRO Publishing.
- O'Hara, T. 1995. Marine Invertebrate Conservation at San Remo. *Victorian Naturalist* 112(1): 50-53.

Internet resources

Nudibranch and flatworm monitoring project:
<http://researchdata.museum.vic.gov.au/marine>
[There is a link here to a web site supporting this project]

ReefWatch Victoria:
<http://reefwatchvic.asn.au/>

Sea Slug Forum:
<http://www.seaslugforum.net/>
[Questions, answers and other nudibranch resources, hosted by Dr Bill Rudman at the Australian Museum, Sydney]

Marine Flatworms of the World:
<http://www.rzuser.uni-heidelberg.de/~bu6>

InfoZone at Museum Victoria:
<http://infozone.museum.vic.gov.au/>

Online Zoological Collections of Australian Museums (OZCAM):
<http://www.ozcam.gov.au/>
[Searching and mapping selected animals from collections of Australian museums]

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