



FACTSHEET

Nudibranchs



Nudibranchs



Common Name: Nudibranchs

Scientific Name: *Nudibranchia*

Conservation Status: The waters around Rottnest Island are a designated Marine Reserve. Some parts of Rottnest's coral reefs and sea grass meadows are included in the Marine Sanctuary Zones shown in the Rottnest Island Marine Management Strategy (2007).

Habitat: Coral reef, Seagrass meadows

Body length: 0.5-6 cm

Description:

Nudibranchs are often called sea slugs but most sea slugs are not actually nudibranchs. Nudibranchs are a type of sea slug with an internal shell. They can grow up to 6 cm in length.

Nudibranchs can vary in colour from bright vivid colours and patterns to dull colours that camouflage well. The colour pattern of the WA nudibranch consists of two pale blue patches prominent on the back, orange gills and tentacles, and orange and black stripes along the body.

The nudibranch has little clumps of feathery like structures on the back of its body.

These are naked gills (named "nudibranch" in Latin giving this animal its name). The gills are 'naked' so that water can continually pass over them, allowing for the extraction of oxygen from the water. They can also be quickly retracted if the animal is disturbed.

Diet:

Algae, corals, sponges, anemones, barnacles, other nudibranchs.

In the wild:

Nudibranchs move in the same way as land snails and slugs by sliding along on a muscular foot. They are carnivores and feed on animals that are sedentary (stay in one place). Nudibranchs have two highly sensitive tentacles called rhinophores on top of their head which they use to identify prey.

Nudibranchs protect themselves from predators with skin glands that contain chemicals that are either poisonous or distasteful to fish. It is thought the bright colour of the nudibranchs helps the fish to



“remember” through association, just how unpalatable they are. Nudibranchs can also use the poisonous chemicals found in their prey for their own body defence.

Nudibranchs are hermaphrodites. This means the animal has both female and male reproductive organs. Mating pairs transfer sperm into each other. The fertilised eggs are then deposited in a coiled mass on a surface in the marine environment. The eggs hatch into larvae, which swim about in the water column until they are ready to settle on the sea bottom. Nudibranchs have a lifespan of usually less than a year and often as little as a month.

Threats:

- Human disturbance
- Pollution
- Aquarium trade

DID YOU KNOW?

There are more than 3,000 known species of nudibranchs, with more being discovered every day!