

Mediterranean Nudibranchs

Platydorís argo

By Miquel Pontes

This dorid nudibranch reaches a maximum length of 10 cm. It has a flat, oval shaped body, which tends to adapt to the irregular surfaces it lives on.

The genus name *Platydorís* is derived from the Greek word "Platýs" that means "wide" and "Doris", a marine nymph of the Greek mythology. The species name "argo" refers to the white stains, typical of this species, that look like eyes. One of the mythological tales of the old Greece says that Argos was "the prince of Argos" or the "Argolid". He had one hundred eyes, of which fifty were open at any given time.

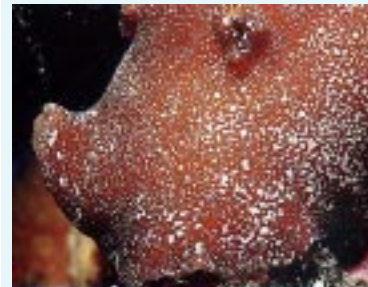
The *notum* or *dorsum* of this animal seems velvety because of the minute tubercles. It is coloured reddish brown with tiny white spots, which vary greatly in number from one specimen to another, giving the impression that the animal is lightly sprayed with white paint. The centre of the dorsum is often darker than the rest of the body. The underside of the body is coloured bright orange and the outer border is slightly undulated.

The rhinophores, used by most prosobranchs as sensory organs, are laminated, smooth in their base, coloured dark brown and can be retracted into a small sheath, presumably for protection. The *Platydorís argo* has 6 tripinnate plume gills, which are also retracted into the *notum* when the animal is disturbed.

Few details are known of this species' biology. It is reported to feed on the bryozoan *Retepora (Sertella) cellulosa*, where it is commonly found and very difficult to spot on because of the nudibranch's homochromic coloration.

The *Platydorís argo* lives on *Posidonia oceanica* meadows and on dark, rocky bottoms and coralligenous walls, down to 40m deep. These coralligenous walls incorrectly derive their name, (incorrectly, as coralligenous means "generator of coral"), from the red Mediterranean coral (*Corallium rubrum*), because they hold certain characteristics which often allow that species of coral to grow, ie. well oxygenated waters, hardly any turbulence, little light and constant salinity.

The *Platydorís argo* is mainly observed in Spring and Summer, when it can be often found mating and laying egg strings, which consist on an orange band laid in spiral. Certain authors consider it is a common species while others consider it is rare. We find that it is frequent but not abundant.



The aeolid, *Favorinus brachialis* (Rathke, 1806) reportedly feeds on *P. argo* eggs.

