mediterranean opisthobranchs

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Thuridilla hopei
Vérany, 1853

Described by Vérany back in 1853, this species is known also as *Thuridilla splendida* (Grube), *Actaeon hopei* (Vérany) or *Elysia splendida* (Grube). It can reach a maximum length of 25 mm.

Its color scheme can not be confused with any other species, with its intense blue (sometimes violet) colored body, and the orange, light blue and white (sometimes yellow) stripes that run along it. These colorful bands may be discontinuous along the parapodia (lateral body extensions) and have an *aposematic* function, that is, they clearly warn predators about the acid secretion this animal uses for defense purposes. The top of the rhinophores and the back of its head are colored white.

The parapodia reach the animal's head, a point quite obvious to the observer, and they are longitudinally rolled over the body so their underside part is what is really visible. By shaking these parapodia the *Thuridilla hopei* can "swim" from one location from another.

The two rhinophores are relatively long, up to 4 mm long. They are rolled and are often adorned with golden yellow bands, some with blue borders. There is no branchial circlet nor internal shell nor dorsal appendixes. The tiny eyes can be distinguished between the parapodia and the rhinophores.

This sacoglossan lives on rocky, shallow and well illuminated bottoms, usually over its food, the green algae *Cladophora vagabunda* and it can be seen both by divers and snorkellers, as it is found from surface to 25 m deep.

It is common in all the Mediterranean and very frequent in certain places and it has been observed that their number follow the algae growth. This opisthobranch is occasionally found over the yellow sponge *Verongia aerophoba*.

fig 1. Photographer – Miquel Pontes

fig. 2 Photographer – Albert Ollé

fig.3 Photographer – Lluís Aguilar